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Nick Carter Stories

ON THE BRINK OF RUIN

or Nick Carter's Helping Hand

NICK CARTER STORIES

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ON THE BRINK OF RUIN;

Or, NICK CARTER'S HELPING HAND.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A REMARKABLE THEFT.

Nick Carter never had seen greater mental distress pictured in the face of a sturdy, vigorous, self-contained man.

It wore the look of one threatened with something even more terrible than death, of one whose honor and all that he held most dear were hanging by a thread.

"Is it as bad as that, Mr. Radcliffe, really as bad as that?" Nick inquired, intently regarding him.

"Bad!" echoed the other hoarsely. "Bad is no name for it, Nick. It could not be worse, could not possibly be worse. God knows what I am suffering, and what an agony of suspense I endure. You must help me, Nick, and pull me out of this, or—heaven above! I shudder to think of the alternative."

The speaker was a handsome, clean-cut man still under forty. He was set up like an athlete, but his countenance denoted superior intellect, a vigorous will, and a lofty character.

His strong, dark face did not belie him and his accomplishments, moreover. For the Honorable Hardy Radcliffe was one of the most brilliant and influential politicians of his time, a prominent man in Washington, and then occupying no less important a position than the assistant secretary of state, a man close to the president and in touch with some of the most serious problems then involving the United States government.

Nick Carter had known him for many years. They had long been close friends, in fact, which was one of the many reasons why the famous detective had immediately responded to the urgent telegram that had brought him to Chester that morning with his assistants.

Another reason was his regard for wealthy Amos Barclay and his only daughter, Joan Alden, a handsome widow to whom Radcliffe was engaged, and whom Nick had done a great service more than a year before in connection with a New York murder case and an attempt to swindle the venerable Chester millionaire.

It was in the library of his splendidly furnished mansion that Nick then was seated, also Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan, his two assistants, having arrived in his touring car only a few minutes before.

The only other occupant of the room was Joan Alden, whose strikingly handsome face and dark eyes reflected an anxiety as poignant as that of the statesman who had addressed Nick so feelingly.

The cordial greetings after the arrival of the detectives had been quickly followed by the remarks above noted, and Nick saw plainly enough that the occasion of Radcliffe's urgent summons must be a matter of vital importance.

"Depend upon it, Hardy, I will do all in my power to aid you," he replied. "I received your telegram while at breakfast, and we made the run from New York in less than two hours."

"I knew that we could rely upon you, Mr. Carter," said Joan gratefully. "We are in terrible distress, both of us, and knew of no one but you to whom we could turn. Mr. Radcliffe will be ruined, his political future hopelessly wrecked, unless you can save him."

"I will leave no stone unturned to do so, Mrs. Alden," Nick replied. "Let's get down to business at once, therefore, that no time may be lost. Begin at the beginning, Radcliffe, and tell me of what your trouble consists."

"I have been robbed of a package of government documents, secret papers of enormous importance," Radcliffe responded. "I should never have removed them from the

state department, should never have taken such a risk. I was mad, nothing less than mad, when I did so."

"What led you to do so, Mr. Radcliffe?"

"That may be quickly explained. As you have heard, perhaps, Joan and I are to be married in June. To-day is her birthday, which I had planned to spend with her and remain over Sunday, and I came on from Washington yesterday. I arrived here about four o'clock."

"I follow you," said Nick.

"As you also know, Nick, my official duties as assistant secretary of state keep me frightfully busy."

"I can imagine so."

"I have hardly a minute that I can call my own," Radcliffe earnestly proceeded. "Knowing that there would be intervals during my visit here when I should be disengaged, and having a very important report to prepare relating to the secret papers mentioned, I resolved to bring them and make a rough draft of my official report while here."

"H'm, I see," said Nick. "That was only the natural step of a busy man. What are the documents, Radcliffe, or the nature of them?"

"They relate to our international policy and a secret agreement with several of the European powers, including Great Britain, Germany, and France, in regard to the increasing menace from the Orient. Our government, as you know, is badly at loggerheads both with the Chinese and the Japs. A complete estrangement is imminent, with what result no man can foresee."

"That is deplorably true, Radcliffe," Nick observed. "The outlook certainly is not encouraging."

"Far from it, indeed," said the statesman. "For some little time, therefore, the state department in Washington has been in secret correspondence with the European powers mentioned, with the result that a secret alliance now exists, which, if discovered by the Oriental powers, would precipitate international complications of a most serious character, if not plunge the world into a war of unparalleled magnitude."

"The situation does, indeed, appear to be very grave," said Nick, after listening attentively.

"Doubly so, Nick, in that some of the secret documents that I have lost bear the seals and signatures of the foreign powers. If these papers fall into unscrupulous hands, as they really must have done—heavens! there is no telling what will follow. Their loss is irreparable. I am nearly frantic when I think I alone am responsible for it. Unless they can be recovered before evil use can be made of them, it will cost me my official position and ruin me politically, and——"

"Stop a moment," interrupted Nick, observing a spasm of despair in Radcliffe's drawn and ghastly face. "You must quit thinking of that side of the question, Hardy, or you will make yourself ill. That will only aggravate a bad matter."

"That is what I have been telling him, Mr. Carter," said Joan, though she was as pale and anxious as Radcliffe. "I have begged him to drop the matter entirely and leave it all to you."

"That's very good advice, too," put in Chick Carter. "A cool head is needed to meet such a crisis as this."

"I know—I know!" groaned Radcliffe. "But what's to be done? What's to be done?"

"The first thing to be done, Radcliffe, is to state the circumstances under which the package of papers was stolen," said Nick. "I then will see what I can do for you."

"I will inform you as briefly as possible," said Radcliffe, pulling himself together again. "I arrived here about four o'clock yesterday afternoon, as I have said, and I took the package from my suit case and locked it in a bureau drawer in my sleeping room. I removed the key and put it under a vase on the mantel."

"Did you suspect any one, or apprehend a robbery, that led you to do so?"

"No, indeed. I had only one reason for locking up the package."

"Namely?"

"I was going out to get shaved and send some telegrams, as we were not to dine until seven, and I locked the package in the drawer merely as a precaution," Radcliffe explained.

"I see," said Nick.

"I left here soon after four. I sent my telegrams and then went to a barber's shop in the Howard House. I was there until half past six."

"In the meantime, Mr. Carter, the theft was committed," said Joan impulsively. "How it could have been done is a mystery. I don't see how the necessary facts could possibly have been learned."

"What facts, Mrs. Alden?" Nick inquired, turning to her.

"All of them," she replied. "Let me explain."

"Do so."

"Mr. Radcliffe had been gone about half an hour, when a local expressman came here on his wagon," Joan continued. "He brought a note to me written on one of the Howard House letter sheets and signed with Mr. Radcliffe's name."

"A forgery?"

"Yes. But the writing so nearly resembled his that I detected no difference, nor suspected anything wrong."

"What was the note?" Nick inquired.

"It contained only a few lines, requestiong me to——"

"Wait!" Radcliffe interrupted, diving into his breast pocket. "Here is the note. See for yourself, Nick. Read it aloud for the benefit of your two assistants."

Nick took the sheet, a neatly penned letter, and read as follows:

"'MY DEAR JOAN: Please deliver to the bearer a sealed package which I placed in the upper drawer of my bureau. I intended to have taken it out to forward it by express. I shall do so before returning. You will find the key of the drawer under a vase on the mantel. I will explain later. HARDY RADCLIFFE.'"

Nick Carter's brows knit closer while he read the brief missive aloud, and Chick drew forward in his chair and exclaimed abruptly:

"Great Scott! This points to something more than robbery, Nick."

"Decidedly. It points to a conspiracy."

"Judging from——"

"One moment," Nick interposed; then, turning to Joan: "You gave the package to the expressman, I infer."

"Yes, certainly," said Joan. "I did not dream of anything wrong."

"No, no, Nick, of course not," put in Radcliffe. "I had

said nothing to her about the package and its important contents. Joan is in no way to blame."

"No, not at all," Nick admitted. "Merely answer my questions, now, that I may bring out such points as may be of advantage. Who was in your room, Radcliffe, when you locked the package in the drawer?"

"I was alone."

"Was the door open?"

"Yes."

"The window curtains were raised, of course?"

"Certainly. It was broad daylight."

"Did you put the key under the vase immediately after locking the drawer?"

"Why, yes, or almost immediately," said Radcliffe. "I did not wish to carry it away in my pocket, nor to leave it in the lock, so I glanced around for a hiding place for it. I saw the vase, which is quite a large one with a hollow base, and I slipped the key under it. It all was done in less than half a minute."

"Did you see any one in the hall?"

"No."

"Or at either window, or hear any sound suggestive of a spy?" Nick inquired.

"No, nothing of the kind. I cannot believe——"

"You must believe, Radcliffe, that some person saw you put the package in the drawer and hide the key," Nick interposed. "The trick was too quickly turned for the discovery of the package to have been made only by chance."

"But——"

"There aren't any buts," Nick insisted. "No other theory is tenable. The forged letter was written, a sheet belonging to the leading local hotel was used, and an expressman employed and sent here, all within an hour after you left the house."

"That is true, Nick," Radcliffe helplessly admitted.

"Your locking up the package and hiding the key may, of course, have suggested to a chance observer the value of the package. I am more than inclined to suspect, however, that the theft was the result of a conspiracy that had its inception much earlier, probably before you left Washington," said Nick. "We will drop that for the present, however, and consider it later. Did you see the expressman, Mrs. Alden?"

"Yes, I saw him at the door, Mr. Carter, when I gave him the package," Joan replied.

"Had you ever seen him before? Did you recognize him?"

"No, I did not. He was a stranger to me. I did, however, recognize the wagon and horse, for the same team has been here before."

"Ah, that may help."

"The wagon bore the name of the express company," Joan added. "I supposed, of course, that Mr. Radcliffe had stopped the man on the street, or called him to the hotel, in order to send him here for the package."

"That was a perfectly natural supposition," Nick allowed. "What is the name of the express company?"

"Gaston & Bridge," said Joan. "It is a local company, and they have a good reputation."

"Describe the driver of the wagon," said Nick.

"He is a short, thickset man, quite dark and about fifty years old, I should say. He has a full beard, too, and wears spectacles."

"Gee! that smacks of a disguise, chief," said Patsy Garvan, breaking out for the first time. "The whole business looks like a carefully planned and cleverly executed game. There's nothing else to it, chief, as I size it up."

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN RUBBERS.

Nick Carter was of very much the same opinion as Patsy Garvan had expressed. He realized more keenly, however, that the case presented numerous mystifying features, as well as difficulties not easily overcome.

"It's one thing to suspect a cleverly planned game, Patsy, but quite another matter to discover the players and successfully checkmate them."

"There's no denying that, chief, for fair," replied Patsy, noting that Nick was looking at him very intently.

Almost at the same moment, too, he received an impression of what Nick had in mind. It was a telepathic communication, in reality, a literal transfer of thought, a faculty with which Nick Carter was wonderfully gifted when dealing with his assistants, partly because they were quick to hit upon the same suspicions as his own, and consequently susceptive to a mental suggestion.

Like a flash it occurred to Patsy that there might be a crook in the house, an eavesdropper in the hall, perhaps, or outside of one of the library windows, and that Nick wanted him to make sure on that point, which might be rendered impossible by giving him audible instructions.

Nick had literally flashed these mental suggestions to Patsy, in fact, and an approving gleam appeared in a corner of his eye when Patsy immediately arose and sauntered quietly toward the open door and into the adjoining hall.

All this was done so quickly, however, that there had been no break in the conversation. Chick was the only other person in the room who knew what actuated Patsy, both Radcliffe and Joan attributing his move to mere restlessness. Nick at once continued the conversation, moreover, by saying to Mr. Radcliffe:

"Let's go a step farther. I think you have said, Radcliffe, that the stolen package was sealed."

"Yes. The documents were in a leather portfolio about a foot long and four inches wide. There was an outside wrapping of oiled silk and heavy brown paper, tied with a strong cord, and securely sealed."

"Was the package marked?"

"Yes. It bore my name and Washington address."

Nick knew that Patsy had by this time caused an eavesdropper, if any existed, to beat a hasty and stealthy retreat, and he now began a line of inquiry which he had briefly deferred. He had refrained from closing the door and windows, both of the latter being screened and open a few inches, lest a listener might infer that he suspected some one in the house and thus be put on his guard. It was for this reason, only, that he had mutely conveyed his instructions to Patsy Garvan.

"Now, Radcliffe," he inquired, "who in Washington knew that you intended to bring the package of documents to Chester?"

"Not a person, Nick, so far as I know," Radcliffe quickly responded. "I am, in fact, quite sure of it."

"And I am doubly sure that you are mistaken," Nick rejoined. "A robbery of this kind could not have been planned and committed during the one hour after you left the house. Previous preparations, with a definite

knowledge of your intention, would have been absolutely necessary."

"It does appear so, I'll admit."

"That is what I have argued," said Joan. "It seems utterly impossible, however, that all of the necessary information could have been discovered, Mr. Carter."

"That it was discovered is obvious," said Nick. "Have you any enemies in Washington, Radcliffe?"

"I have political foes and plenty of them," Radcliffe asserted, a bit grimly. "But I know of none who would stoop to such deviltry as this, or venture to risk detection and a conviction of treason."

"Where were the papers when you decided to bring them here?"

"In a safe in my private office in the state department."

"Were they sealed at that time?"

"No. They were merely in the portfolio."

"Did you put them in the outside wrappers and seal them, or did you direct a clerk to do so?"

"I did it," said Radcliffe. "I wrapped and sealed the package myself. Furthermore, no clerk was in my office at that time, not even my stenographer."

"You were alone all the while?"

"Yes. I am positive of that."

"Was your office door open?"

"No. It was closed."

"Not even ajar?"

"No. I am sure of it."

"Could a person looking through the keyhole have seen what you were doing?"

"Impossible. Neither the safe nor my desk, on which I tied up the package, could be seen through the keyhole. Furthermore, a spy outside would have been detected by clerks in the outer office. There are half a dozen of them. Surely all are not involved in this infernal knavery."

"Could a spy have been concealed in your office at the time?"

"No. That is out of the question."

"Could any person have examined your safe after you left and have learned that you had removed the portfolio?"

"Impossible. I locked the safe and scattered the combination."

"Who besides you knows the combination?"

"Only my stenographer, who is also my private secretary."

"Are you sure of his honesty?"

"Her honesty," corrected Radcliffe. "I am absolutely sure. She is my cousin, and a girl of the highest character."

"H'm, I see," said Nick. "There seems to be a mystery at that end of the case. I still am sure, nevertheless, that some person knew you removed the package and brought it to Chester."

"I don't see how that is possible," Radcliffe insisted. "I confided in no one. I put the package in my suit case before leaving my office. It could not have been seen, even by the persons who saw me leave."

"Well, well, we'll drop that again for the present," said Nick. "Now, Mrs. Alden, how about your servants? Are you sure they are honest?"

"If I were not, Mr. Carter, I would speedily get rid of them," said Joan.

"How many do you employ?"

"Five house servants. Our chauffeur, Martin Page, and the man who looks after the grounds, Patrick Grady, both have rooms in the stable."

"Who are the house servants?"

"Hilton, the butler," said Joan. "Two girls named Hilda West and Margaret Craige, the former my maid. Then there is Nora, the cook, and James Dane, who is employed as a valet and nurse for my father, who is quite feeble, as you know, and seldom leaves his apartments."

"All know of the theft, I suppose?"

"Yes, all, I think. They assert, however, that they are entirely innocent and know nothing about it. I am inclined to believe them."

"Nevertheless, I would like to question the house servants briefly," said Nick, though he really only wanted to see them. "Have Hilton come here with them."

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Permit me to question them, please, and dismiss them when I have finished," Nick added.

Joan bowed agreeably, and rang for the butler.

Hilton presently appeared, a tall and sedate man of middle age, every line and feature of whose smoothly shaved face denoted his strict integrity and punctilious loyalty to his employers and his duties.

Nick directed him to call the other servants, and they soon followed him into the room.

Nora, the cook, was a corpulent woman of fifty, the last to warrant suspicion of complicity in any kind of a game.

James Dane, the nurse and valet, was also an elderly man of prepossessing type, and one not readily inviting distrust.

The younger of the two girls, Margaret Craige, was about twenty. She was a plain, freckled girl with red hair and faded blue eyes, as inexpressive as her unattractive countenance and slender, somewhat angular figure.

Hilda West, on the contrary, was a finely formed girl of twenty-five, with dark hair and clean-cut features, which were softened, in a measure, by an air of timidity and reserve, with a noticeably demure expression about her thin-lipped mouth and in her dark eyes. A keen observer, however, would have quickly detected that she had reserve forces in abundance when occasion required.

Nick questioned them briefly along conventional lines, chiefly as to what they were doing when the theft was committed. He did so in a way, however, denoting that he suspected none of them.

"Tell me," he at length said, addressing them collectively; "whether you have seen at any time since yesterday morning, when Mr. Radcliffe left Washington, any strangers in the grounds or the adjoining streets whose actions appeared suspicious. I mean as if they were watching this house, or had some covert interest in it."

"I have seen no one, sir," replied Hilton respectfully. "What do you say? You heard the gentleman's question," he added, turning to the group of servants.

"Faith, I've seen no one," said Nora, with some bluntness. "Only the butcher's boy, he was a new one, and he looked like he wasn't all there."

"I didn't refer to the tradesmen's clerks, but to persons apparently having no business here," said Nick. "You appear to have something on your mind, my girl. What is it?"

The last was addressed to the dark-eyed maid, Hilda West, who appeared anxious to speak, but too timid to do so."

She colored and replied, however, when directly questioned:

"I saw a man, sir, please you."

"When and where?"

"In the grounds of the next house, sir, where Mr. Codman lives."

"She refers to our nearest neighbor on the east," explained Joan, glancing at the detective. "His estate adjoins ours."

Nick bowed and turned again to Hilda West.

"When did you see the man?" he asked. "What was he doing. Tell me all about it."

"It was after three o'clock yesterday afternoon, sir, less than an hour before Mr. Radcliffe came," said Hilda demurely. "I was in his room, sir, which the mistress had sent me to dust up a little and see that everything was in order. I saw the man from one of the windows, sir, while I was arranging the lace curtains."

"Where was he?"

"He was looking through a gap in the hedge, sir, that runs between the two grounds."

"Looking at what?"

"Well, sir, I thought at first he was looking at me. I thought he saw me near the window, mebbe, and was trying to flirt," said Hilda, blushing profusely and manifesting considerable embarrassment. "But I guess he wasn't, sir, for he didn't make any signs."

"Are you sure, nevertheless, that he was looking toward the windows of Mr. Radcliffe's room?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I'm sure of that. I could see him quite plainly."

"Did he see you?"

"I don't think so, sir, now. I was back of the lace curtains. I wouldn't have thought of him again, sir, if you hadn't asked such questions."

"I understand," said Nick. "How long did the man remain there?"

"Well, sir, I don't know. I didn't wait to watch him," said Hilda, blushing again. "I went on with my work, and did not see him afterward. The last I saw of him, sir, he was sitting on the ground and putting on a pair of rubbers."

"Rubbers, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said the girl, giggling. "I thought that was funny, sir, for the ground was perfectly dry. It hasn't rained for a week. I couldn't see why he wanted rubbers."

"I can see quite plainly, perhaps," Nick said dryly. "Describe the man, my girl, and how he was dressed."

"He was kind of a small man, sir, in a dark suit and a cap. That's all I noticed, sir."

"How old would you say he is?"

"Somewhere near twenty-five, sir," said Hilda. "But I'm not very sure about that. It's only a guess."

"That is sufficiently definite," Nick replied; then, a bit pointedly: "How does it happen, my girl, knowing that a crime has been committed here, that you have not mentioned this man to your mistress, or to Mr. Radcliffe?"

The girl colored deeply again and appeared confused. Then, glancing apprehensively at Joan, as if she suddenly feared that she might be suspected, she said hurriedly:

"I didn't think anything about him, sir. I wouldn't now, only you ask such questions. I don't know anything about the crime, sir. I——"

"Oh, I don't suspect you of any duplicity, my girl," Nick interposed. "I am only trying to find some clew to the thief. You may have helped me do so."

"I hope so, sir, truly," exclaimed Hilda, with a look of relief.

"That is all, Hilton," Nick added, with a wave of his hand. "You may go."

Hilton bowed and signed for the servants to follow him from the room.

"Now, Radcliffe, one more question and I will set to work on this case," said Nick: "You have made inquiries at the express office, of course, concerning the wagon that came here?"

"Yes, certainly."

"What did you learn?"

"I saw Mr. Gaston, the head of the firm, to whom I described the team and driver," Radcliffe explained. "He knew nothing about the package, nor a man of my description, but he said the team I described was usually driven by a man named Abe Smollet."

"A man in Gaston's employ?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen Smollet?"

"Yes. He had driven into the stable only a few minutes before. I found him unhitching his horses."

"That was last evening?"

"Yes, about half past six. I hastened there immediately after learning of the theft. Smollet also claimed that he knew nothing about the package. He stated, however, that he went into the Howard House barroom about five o'clock and bought a drink and lunch, leaving his team in a side street. It was missing when he came out."

"H'm. I see," said Nick.

"He supposed that the horses had become restless and walked away, and he at once began a search for them. He found them more than a block away in the next street some ten minutes later. He said he was mightily puzzled, the horses being reliable animals. When I told him about the theft, however, he came to the same conclusion I had formed, that the team had been stolen by the rascal who called here for the package, and afterward driven to where Smollet found it. The trick could have been turned in less than fifteen minutes."

"That was all Smollet could tell you?"

"Yes."

"Very good," said Nick, rising abruptly. "Now, Radcliffe, I'll see what I can do for you."

CHAPTER III.

SEEKING THE TRAIL.

"Well?"

Nick Carter's terse inquiry was addressed in a whisper to Patsy Garvan, who had reappeared at the library door while Nick was interrogating the servants.

"Nothing doing," Patsy quietly informed him. "The only persons in the hall were those two servant girls. They were standing near the dining-room door."

"Did either appear to be listening to what I was saying?"

"Not that I could detect. Nor was there any one outside. I sauntered into the parlor and looked from one of the windows."

"Did you hear what was said about Smollet and the stealing of his team?"

"Every word," replied Patsy. "I returned just as you questioned Radcliffe on that point. Kind of a fishy story, isn't it?"

"It is a bit strange, at least, that he left his team at just the right moment for a crook to turn this trick, also that he found it so quickly after the trick had been turned," said Nick. "Having landed his plunder, a crook would not ordinarily have returned the team to a point so near where it was stolen."

"That's right, too. It was a needless risk."

"There may be something in this," Nick added. "You slip away in a few minutes and see what you can learn about Smollet. Find out whether he is in the habit of leaving his team to buy a drink, also whether any one saw him searching for it. Phone to me here if you pick up anything of importance."

"I'm on, chief, all right," returned Patsy. "I'll get away inside of five minutes."

These remarks had not reached other ears, nor been intended for others. Chick Carter then was talking with Radcliffe and Joan Alden near one of the library windows, but all three turned when Nick said quite abruptly:

"Now, Radcliffe, let's go up to your room. I want a look from the window mentioned by Hilda West. I will not trouble you to go with us, Mrs. Alden."

"Very well," said Joan.

"This way," said Radcliffe.

He conducted the two detectives to a handsomely furnished side room on the second floor. Nick prevented him from closing the door after they had entered, but explained only with a glance which the statesman could not then interpret.

"At present, Radcliffe, it looks very much as if some second-story work has been done here," he said, in tones loud enough to be heard in the lower hall. "What Hilda West told us about a strange man rubbering at these windows, and also putting on rubbers, is quite significant."

"Significant?" questioned Radcliffe shortly.

"Yes. Rubbers are frequently worn by crooks in order to walk noiselessly."

"Oh, I see! You think, then——"

"Stop a moment," Nick interposed. "This is the bureau and this the vase, I infer, under which you hid the key?"

"Yes."

"Hilda did her work well. She left no dust on the mantel, nor on the top of the bureau," said Nick, while he quickly inspected both with his lens. "I thought I might find finger marks left by the rascal."

"But the thief did not remove the package from the bureau," objected Radcliffe, puzzled by the detective's remarks. "Joan was the only one who entered this room after I departed."

"Don't you be too sure of that," replied Nick. "It may be that your package was stolen and another substituted, for Joan to hand to the expressman. There is no telling, at present, just what crafty work has been done in this job. It's a little out of the ordinary. Were these windows closed and locked while you were here?"

"Yes, both of them."

"Did you leave them locked when you went out?"

"I did. I am sure of that, Nick."

Both windows were screened, which, in addition to the lace draperies hanging straight from their rods, would have made it difficult for a spy outside to obtain a view of the room. They would, however, have also protected him from observation from within.

Nick put aside the draperies and opened one of the windows. It commanded a view of the park and the grounds east of the house. Some fifty yards away was the high, boxwood hedge mentioned by Hilda West, and the gap through which she had seen the strange man.

Two feet below the windows was the flat roof of a side veranda. It was covered with painted canvas and ornamented with a scrollwork fence running entirely around it.

"Ah, by Jove, here is confirmation of Hilda's story," Nick cried, leaning out to inspect the roof. "Here are tracks left by slightly soiled rubbers. The wearer evidently had stepped in the dark loam of a flower bed, or—yes, I'm right! See for yourselves. Note the crisscross lines left by the bottoms of the rubbers. They were a new pair."

Nick had sprung out upon the roof, followed by both Chick and Radcliffe.

The tracks mentioned were quite plainly discernible. They evidently had been left by a man crouching nearly under one of the windows.

At that end of the veranda nearer the rear of the house was a high trellis, thickly covered with climbing woodbine. Nick had approached it, while speaking, and was gazing down at a flower bed flanking the side wall of the house beyond the rear end of the veranda. There in the dark soil, also, the same telltale tracks of rubbers could be plainly seen.

"Second-story work is right, Nick," Chick agreed. "The rascal evidently climbed this trellis and was watching Radcliffe when he locked the package in the bureau and hid the key."

"Good heavens!" Radcliffe exclaimed. "Can it really be possible? I should think I must have seen him."

"Such rats have a faculty for escaping detection," Nick said dryly. "Notice, too, that he would have been comparatively safe from observation outside. The trees prevent a view from the windows of the Codman dwelling. The garage and stable are on the opposite side of the house, and this low fence would have shielded the scamp from any person passing by chance through the grounds east of the house."

"You may be right," Radcliffe admitted.

"It's a cinch," Chick declared. "There's nothing to it."

"Let's go down," Nick said abruptly. "I want to make a closer inspection of those tracks in the flower bed. There is no more to be learned up here."

He led the way, the others following, and hastened out to the rear of the veranda. There he briefly studied the tracks in the soil, also particles of the dark loam on several bars of the trellis, indicating that the spy had, indeed, climbed it in order to reach the veranda roof. This was further confirmed by numerous green leaves and twigs scattered on the ground at the base of the trellis, evidently broken from the woodbine while he made the ascent.

Chick Carter picked up several and examined them.

"They are too fresh and green to have dropped from the vine," said he. "It's dead open and shut, Nick, that the scamp climbed this trellis and was watching Radcliffe when he hid the key."

"The evidence certainly appears very convincing," Nick agreed, a bit dryly.

"But I'll be hanged if I can fathom it," Radcliffe declared impatiently. "How could the rascal have broken

into my room without being heard? How could a package have been prepared and substituted for mine, Nick, as you seem to think? How could——"

"Don't ask so many questions, Radcliffe, nor what I think at this stage of the game," Nick interrupted. "You are not expected to fathom all of the evidence and conflicting circumstances which this case presents. That's not in your line. You have employed me to do it. Be patient, then, while I get in my work. Call Danny, Chick, and have him bring around the car. I'm going into town."

"Into town?" questioned Radcliffe, while Chick hastened out to the garage to inform their chauffeur. "Why are you going into town? What——"

Nick checked him with a gesture.

"Now, Radcliffe, listen to me for a moment," he said impressively. "You are completely upset by the loss of these state documents. You are absolutely unfit to aid me materially, nor could you do so even at your best. I want you to remain right here, therefore, and drop the matter."

"But, Nick——"

"There is no alternative, Radcliffe, if I am to continue my work on the case," Nick quietly insisted. "You must leave it entirely to me and give me reasonable time in which to do my work. I may return in an hour, or I may not show up again before to-morrow. In either case, Radcliffe, you must stay right here and enjoy yourself. Take it from me, I shall not be idle."

"I know that, Nick, of course. But enjoyment is out of the question," groaned Radcliffe. "My burden——"

"Throw it off," Nick interrupted. "Put it one side. Worry will not help the matter, nor anxiety cut any ice. Be patient, therefore, till you see or hear from me again. I hear my chauffeur coming with the car, and as time is valuable—well, I have said all that could be said in a volume. Not a word, Radcliffe, nor a move in this matter till you have word from me. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Radcliffe said simply, extending his hand.

"Good enough! I'll be off at once, then."

Nick hastened around to the front of the house, where Danny was just slowing down with the detective's touring car, in which Chick was seated.

"Keep her moving, Danny," Nick directed, while he sprang upon the footboard and entered the tonneau. "Turn to the left after leaving the driveway."

"What's up?" Chick inquired curiously. "Have you found a thread worth following?"

"I think so."

"Tell me——"

"Not yet," Nick interposed. "We'll meet at the Howard House in half an hour. I will register as James Damon and get a suite of rooms. Join me there, and I then will inform you."

"But where are you going, now?"

"That also will keep for half an hour. In the meantime, Chick, you must visit the central telephone exchange. Find out whether a Washington wire was used yesterday, and at what time, also, if possible, who was on this end of it."

"Do you suspect that the robbery had its inception in Washington?"

"I do."

"And that instructions were telephoned to some person in Chester?"

"Exactly."

"I've got you."

"It may be impossible to learn who telephoned from Washington, assuming that I am right, but you can easily learn with whom he was connected in Chester," said Nick. "Find out and meet me in the Howard House. Slow down, Danny; I'm going no farther."

They had left the Barclay place, which was in an aristocratic outskirt of the city, and had passed the Codman estate adjoining it. Without waiting to explain, Nick arose and sprang from the car, adding simply:

"Go ahead. I'll see you in half an hour."

"So long!" said Chick. "I'll be ready with my report."

Nick returned to a street flanking one side of the Codman estate, to the rear of which he proceeded, pausing briefly in a narrow back street to put on a simple disguise with which he was provided.

Having made sure he was not seen, he then scaled a back fence and sought the boxwood hedge dividing the grounds from the Barclay place.

Sheltered by it, Nick stole to the gap through which Hilda West said she had seen the suspected stranger. Peering cautiously through it, Nick watched the windows of the Barclay mansion for several minutes, but he saw nothing of any significance.

He then began a careful inspection of a path leading through the gap in the hedge, and of the surrounding greensward. On his hands and knees, with the intent scrutiny and comprehensive insight of a redskin seeking a trail, Nick examined every foot of the ground, every stone and pebble, nearly every blade of grass, in fact, before stealing out by the way he had entered.

It was precisely noon when he arrived at the Howard House, still in disguise, where he registered under the fictitious name agreed upon and went up to the suite assigned him.

Chick put in an appearance ten minutes later, Danny having gone with the car to the hotel garage. A glance at Chick's face convinced Nick that he had made at least one important discovery.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S INSIGHT.

Nick Carter was seated near one of the parlor windows of their suite when Chick entered. He had removed his disguise and tossed it upon the mantel. He had had half an hour since leaving the Barclay residence in which to consider the evidence he had discovered and the circumstances surrounding the robbery, and he was not surprised at the expression on Chick's face when he entered.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I guess I was right."

Chick laughed and drew up a chair.

"Right with capital letters, Nick," he replied. "You have rung a bull's-eye, for fair."

"Some one telephoned yesterday from Washington, eh?"

"That's what," Chick replied. "I could not learn who talked from that end, nor of what the communication consisted, but I found out who did the talking in Chester."

"Well?"

"Give a guess."

"I'm not good as guessing," said Nick. "Tell me."

"That prince of blackmailers, that elusive miscreant who slipped through our fingers even after we landed him in court—Doctor Gordon Quigley."

"H'm, is that so? Quigley, eh?"

Nick's face had undergone a quick change, a decidedly ominous one. He had expected Chick to verify the suspicion he had formed, but was not expecting him to discover that Doctor Gordon Quigley was in Chester.

"Has nothing led you to expect this disclosure?" Chick inquired, noting Nick's change of expression.

"No, nothing."

"You certainly suspected the communication from Washington."

"Yes," said Nick. "I felt sure of that. But Quigley's presence in Chester adds to the complications in this case."

"Very true."

"It's ten to one, Chick, that he's the man behind the gun."

"True again," Chick agreed. "It's a pity that we could not convict him of attempting to murder old Mr. Barclay a year ago, after rounding him up with the rest of the gang."

"That was no fault of ours," Nick replied. "Quigley is a very clever and crafty fellow. When engaged in one of his infamous blackmailing schemes, he invariably covers his own tracks and wheedles others into pulling his chestnuts from the fire."

"That's always his scheme, all right."

"And that case of more than a year ago was no exception," Nick added. "Though we were morally sure of his guilt, that he got next to Barclay's nephew and put him up to substituting a crook for the old man's missing daughter, with a view to getting his millions by hastening his death, the scurvy rat contrived with the help of an able criminal lawyer to escape conviction."

"Despite that we sent up every other member of the gang," Chick put in. "It would have been a different story, Nick, if we could have forced one of them to squeal."

"Squeal!" echoed Nick, a bit derisively. "Why, Chick, he had that all fixed before he went into the game. That appeared in the attitude he took when I cornered him and was about to arrest him, only to be held up by Barclay's nephew and others of the gang."

"I remember."

"They seized Quigley, as well as me, and confined him in the cellar. That was cut and dried, Chick, that he might assert in court that he was ignorant of any part of the knavery."

"The jury fell for it, at all events."

"The slow poison he was suspected of administering to Barclay did not appear in the medicines found in the sick room, moreover, and his lawyer contrived to pull him out of the mess, which was much more to his credit as a lawyer, than to Quigley's as a crook."

"True; very much more."

"Quigley had it all fixed before he went into the game, nevertheless, and he may be equally farsighted and crafty if, as now appears probable, he figures in this case."

"Probably because of the Washington communication?" asked Chick.

"Yes, certainly."

"Is that specially significant?"

"It's the one thing that made this robbery possible," said Nick. "Without it, Chick, a robbery involving so many features and committed within an hour after Radcliffe's arrival in Chester, could not possibly have been planned and perpetrated."

"I agree with you to that extent."

"The frame-up of it shows plainly that some person in Chester knew that Radcliffe had left Washington with important papers, which he intended taking to the Barclay residence. Did you learn at what time Quigley was called up?"

"Yes, as you directed," said Chick. "The call came from Washington soon after nine o'clock yesterday morning."

"Just as I suspected," said Nick. "Radcliffe left Washington on the nine-o'clock train. The party who telephoned had seen him prepare the package and was informed of its contents, in spite of Radcliffe's belief in the contrary. He also knew that Quigley was in Chester, and could be relied upon to plan and commit the robbery."

"It does appear so, Nick, surely."

"It must be so," Nick insisted. "It gave Quigley nearly all of yesterday in which to plan the job. Bear in mind how it was done. Radcliffe arrived at the Barclay residence about three o'clock. He went out at four, after locking the package in his bureau and hiding the key. Less than an hour later an expressman called with a letter bearing Radcliffe's signature, and evidently written in the Howard House. It stated where the package and key had been put. Obviously, therefore, Radcliffe was seen when hiding them."

"Certainly. There is no getting around that."

"It would have been a physical impossibility, however, for any person in the house to come to this hotel, write the forged letter, find and employ an expressman, and then return to the Barclay place—all in the hour that elapsed between Radcliffe's departure and the arrival of the expressman."

"That's right, too."

"Plainly enough, then, the writer of the letter must have been waiting in the Howard House to hear from some person who had agreed to watch Radcliffe after his arrival and find out where he put the package, providing he removed it from his suit case."

"I see the point," said Chick.

"He was immediately informed, probably by telephone, also that Radcliffe had gone out; and he then wrote the letter and sent a confederate to get the package."

"I follow you."

"Whether the confederate was the expressman, or whether the expressman's team was really stolen, as Smollet has stated, remains to be learned," Nick proceeded. "I already have started Patsy on that trail."

"I suspected that when I saw him leaving the Barclay residence," said Chick. "You seem to be hitting very near the mark, Nick. You reason, I suppose, that the spy was on the veranda and that he telephoned the necessary information to Quigley, or whomever was waiting for it in the hotel."

"Telephoned it—yes!" Nick pointedly replied. "But the spy was not on the veranda."

"No?"

"Not by a long chalk."

"I suppose from what you said before leaving the Barclay place that you thought so."

"My design, Chick, was only to make another believe that that was my suspicion."

"Another?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The real spy."

"Some one in the house?"

"Exactly," said Nick. "There was no spy on the veranda, Chick. All of the evidence pointing to that was manufactured, faked, planted in order to avert suspicion from an inmate of the house. I suspected that from the moment I began talking with Hilda West."

"Great Scott!" Chick exclaimed. "You think she was the spy?"

"Positively."

"She don't look it. She appears as demure as a country schoolgirl."

"Put on, assumed, feigned, Chick, the whole business," Nick declared. "Take it from me, Hilda West is as crafty a jade as ever stood in leather. I could detect that in her eyes, in her affected giggle, and in the artfulness with which she told her story."

"About seeing a strange man in the adjoining grounds?"

"Precisely. Bear in mind, Chick, that she was the only one who saw him. That, and the fact that she had not reported it to her mistress, or to Radcliffe, first led me to distrust her."

"But the evidence——"

"She fixed that, Chick, after telephoning the necessary information to the Howard House," Nick interrupted. "It may have been suggested to her by Quigley, assuming that he was the man. It would have been an easy matter for her to have found a pair of man's rubbers in the house, to have made the tracks in the flower bed and on the veranda roof, to have torn off a few leaves and twigs from the woodbine, and soiled with loam the bars of the trellis."

"Certainly," Chick admitted. "Dead easy."

"I confirmed all this, Chick, after leaving the house."

"How so?"

"By inspecting the ground near the gap in the hedge."

"No tracks of rubbers there, eh?"

"Not a sign of any, nor anything showing that a man has recently been there," said Nick. "The girl evidently did not think it necessary to go as far as that, or she may have feared that she might be seen from the house. It was reasonably safe for her to do the work back of the veranda and on the roof."

"Perfectly so, if reasonably cautious," said Chick.

"Trust her for that."

"Right, Nick, if your other deductions are correct."

"I am willing to bank on that."

"You certainly appear to have made good, Nick, and in a very short time."

"Not exactly made good," Nick replied more gravely. "We have taken only the first steps. Our suspicions cut no great ice unless we can produce positive proof of them. These papers that Radcliffe has lost are not only of tremendous importance, but of a character, which, unless we can recover them in a very few hours, will enable the crooks to turn their knowledge of them to subsequent use. In other words, Chick, we've got to get that package of documents before it can be opened and its contents thoroughly digested by the rascals."

"Can that be done?"

"It must be done," Nick forcibly argued. "Nothing else will save Radcliffe from hopeless political ruin."

"That's true."

"The nature of the documents evidently is known by the crook in Washington. I very much doubt, however, that the rascals in Chester will appreciate their full significance and vast value. We must recover them, therefore, before they can learn the truth."

"The crook in Washington may have informed Quigley," Chick suggested.

"I don't think so. He might refer to the package as vastly valuable, but he would not have disclosed the character of the papers by telephone."

"There is something in that."

"We must, at all events, take that chance," Nick said decidedly.

"What are your plans?"

"We must get in our work without showing our hands," said Nick. "That's why I pretended to swallow Hilda West's story, and to appear convinced by the evidence we discovered. Take it from me, Chick, she heard much that I said while making my investigations."

"No doubt."

"That girl must be shadowed," Nick added. "Patsy already is on Smollet's trail. We shall hear from him later. In the meantime, we must find out what brought Quigley to Chester and where he is stopping. Did you inquire at the telephone exchange?"

"Sure thing," Chick said quickly. "Better still, I found out."

"Good! Where is he living?"

"Right here."

"In this house?"

"Yes. He has been here for nearly a month."

"He is here for deviltry of some kind, then, you can bet on that," said Nick, with a frown. "He may have bolted, too, since turning this trick. If he has not, we shall need more positive proof of his part in it, assuming that we are right, than merely the Washington communication. We must find him, if possible, or learn definitely whether he has bolted. He is such an infernally crafty rat that —hello! Can Radcliffe have followed us? Come in!"

Nick's digression was occasioned by an unexpected knock on the hall door. In response to his invitation the door was opened and a visitor appeared on the threshold—the very man of whom the detective had been speaking.

Doctor Gordon Quigley!

CHAPTER V.

AN AUDACIOUS KNAVE.

If Nick Carter, or Chick, felt any surprise upon seeing the imposing figure of Doctor Gordon Quigley framed in the open door, neither of them betrayed it.

Both gazed at him for half a minute without speaking, however, while Quigley stood bowing and smiling, hat in hand, running his fingers through his mop of bronze-hued hair, and appearing for all the world like one whom the detectives might reasonably have cordially greeted.

He was clad as usual in immaculate linen and a fashionable plaid cutaway suit, perfectly polished shoes, and he carried under his arm a gold-headed cane.

Nick Carter was not sorry to see him, quite the contrary.

He realized at once, however, that Quigley had not come there without an object, that something of vast importance to him had occasioned the visit.

Nothing else could have induced him to brave the ani-

mosity and censure of a detective as outspoken as Nick, who, Quigley knew only too well, was thoroughly informed of his infamous character, as well as of many of the dastardly blackmailing outrages he had perpetrated upon victims, who, rather than submit to complete exposure and public humiliation, had mutely suffered his villainous extortions.

"Well, Quigley, what do you want here?" Nick asked bluntly.

"Ah!" Doctor Quigley exclaimed unctuously. "You recognize me. You invited me to come in, Mr. Carter, so I think I will accept your kind invitation. I will not, however, intrude long upon your valuable time. I was not sure that you would remember me. I am glad to renew my acquaintance with both of you gentlemen. We have not met, I think, since those unfortunate episodes of more than a year ago, when you blundered so egregiously in suspecting me of——"

"Stop a moment," Nick curtly interrupted. "Sit down, Quigley, and cut out that horseplay. You know very well that I never forget a rascal."

"Rascal?"

"That's the word I used, Quigley, and I applied it to you."

"Really, Carter, that is both unkind and unjust," Doctor Quigley protested, with oily suavity. "A jury acquitted me of all that you alleged. You must admit, therefore, that you were wrong. Twelve against one; think of it! The odds are all in my favor."

"I have done all the thinking about that case, Quigley, that I intend to do," said Nick, sternly regarding him. "What do you want here?"

"Nothing. That is to say, nothing in a line with what you probably suspect. I have no covert motive."

"Wonderful!"

"Yes?"

"Most extraordinary!"

Doctor Quigley smiled and appeared unruffled. He rubbed his hands and stroked his creased trousers, then snipped a speck of dust from one of his sleeves, all the while with a covert leer lurking in the corners of his sharp gray eyes.

"I merely happened to see your assistant, Chick Carter, entering the hotel a short time ago," said he. "I inquired at the desk and learned that he came up to this suite. I inferred that you were here, also, so I thought I would come up and pay my respects. I want you to know, Carter, that I bear you no animosity because of the past."

"Thank you," said Nick dryly. "Quite likely, however, the future will give rise to plenty of it."

"Dear me, I hope not. That would be deplorable."

"What are you doing in Chester, Quigley?"

"I might ask you the same question, Carter," Doctor Quigley replied. "It is entirely unnecessary, however. You are here on a case, presumably a very important one, since the services of so great a detective are required."

"You know all about it, then," Nick remarked.

"About what?"

"The case."

"Dear me, no!" Doctor Quigley exclaimed, grinning broadly. "I know nothing about it. I infer that you are on a case only because you have been wearing a disguise, which I see on the mantel. Obviously, then, there must be something doing."

Nick ignored the covert leer and the bantering tone of the rascal. He drew up a little in his chair, however, replying sternly:

"There will be something doing between you and me, Quigley, one of these days. Why don't you answer my question? What are you doing in Chester?"

Doctor Quigley laughed.

"Merely enjoying myself," he replied. "I took a fancy to the place when here a year ago. I decided to pay it another visit. I have been here about a month. I have a suite on the floor above. Permit me to inform you, incidentally, that you can find me there whenever you want me."

"I'll find you, Quigley, when I want you," Nick replied dryly. "You have been idle all the while, I suppose?"

"Quite so, Carter, I assure you."

"Be careful what you say. You should know, Quigley, that I always copper most of your statements."

"Dear me! You imply that you think me a liar."

"Imply it, eh? You know very well that I think so. Who is your friend in Washington, Quigley?"

"Washington?"

"With whom you talked by telephone yesterday morning?" Nick curtly added.

Doctor Quigley's eyes snapped sharply for an instant, then quickly resumed their leer of sinister amusement. He laughed in his oily, mirthless fashion, then inquired indifferently:

"How did you learn of that?"

"Never mind how," said Nick. "Answer my question."

"I'd like to, Carter, really. It is quite impossible, however."

"Why impossible?"

"Because I don't know."

"Don't know with whom you talked?"

"Precisely," said Quigley, with a smile. "It was exceedingly strange. I was called up from the telephone office and told that a man in Washington wanted to talk with me. I was put in communication with him; but, dear me, I could not make head or tail to what he was saying. I had hard work to convince him that he had made a mistake. I finally succeeded, however, and that was the end of it. Strange, wasn't it? Very odd, I think. Don't you?"

"You wouldn't be pleased to hear what I think about it," said Nick, not without an object in prolonging the conversation. "What was the man's name?"

Doctor Quigley smiled again and shook his head.

"I don't know," he complacently asserted. "I did not get his name."

"And you have no idea, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest. How could I?"

"Nor any idea, perhaps, as to who stole a package of very important papers from the Honorable Hardy Radcliffe, now visiting in the Barclay residence," said Nick, sharply eying him.

"Package of papers! Stolen from the Barclay residence!" Doctor Quigley exclaimed, with a great display of surprise. "Most assuredly, Carter, I know nothing about them. What kind of papers? When were they stolen? Who——"

"Save your breath, Quigley," Nick advised, interrupting. "I shall answer none of your questions. You may refuse to answer mine, if so inclined, but——"

"No, no, why should I?" Doctor Quigley cut in. "I have nothing to conceal. Besides, Carter, I am much more polite than you. I am always pleased to answer a civil question. A package of papers stolen—dear me! I suppose a reward will be offered."

"Quite likely."

"And no questions asked?"

"Possibly."

"A reward that I should receive, no doubt, if I could recover and return the papers," said Doctor Quigley, as if hit with an idea. "Really, I might succeed in doing so."

"Unless I am much mistaken, Quigley, that is the first time you have spoken the truth."

"Ah! you are becoming facetious," said Quigley, laughing. "But I am as clever as you, Carter, and I might succeed. You know from experience that I am as clever as you. I must cut short my call. I must pay the beautiful Mrs. Alden a visit, and learn the particulars. She will not bear me any animosity, as you evidently do, knowing that an intelligent jury acquitted me of your absurd charges. I must pay her a visit and get the particulars. I will see you again, gentlemen; I will see you again. I suppose that you, too, are out after those papers? You will try to get them before me and secure the reward. You may succeed. You may, of course, but I'll give you a run for the money."

Doctor Quigley had arisen while glibly pouring forth these audacious remarks, and was hurriedly drawing on his gloves. Nick arose and stopped him, however, when he turned to leave the room.

"Wait one moment, Quigley," he said sternly, confronting him. "I have a word for you before you go."

"Yes?"

"I am, as you state, out to recover those papers. I'm out, also, to get the rat who stole them. I'm going to get him, too. I think that you are the rat, Quigley, and when I trap you, as I surely shall, no crack lawyer will pull you out with a whole skin. I'll put you where you belong, you miscreant, behind prison bars."

Doctor Quigley did not shrink from Nick's threatening eyes. He laughed again, apparently unruffled, and leaned for a moment on his cane.

"How absurdly hot-headed you are, Carter," said he, with mocking suavity. "Why don't you try to control yourself? It is a wonder to me that you have lived so long. Take heed that you don't get bitten. Rats, you know, have very sharp teeth. Good morning."

Nick allowed him to go, without replying, then listened briefly at the closed door. He heard the rascal's receding steps and presently the clang of the elevator door. He then turned to Chick, who had listened to the remarkable interview without interrupting.

"I thought I would not butt in," said he. "You stood for it, I infer, only with a view to learning why he came here."

"Precisely," said Nick, resuming his seat.

"Have you any idea?"

"It's hard to say," said Nick. "He must have known, of course, that he could not blind me into believing any of his statements. He may have come to put up that story about the Washington communication, apprehending that I would suspect it. Or he may have hoped to learn what else we have discovered, or of what our suspicions consist."

"Possibly."

"Be that as it may, Chick, we'll go at this matter with hammer and tongs," said Nick. "Are our suit cases in the car?"

"Yes, unless Danny has brought them into the hotel."

"In either case, then, get yours and leave town in the car," Nick directed. "Let Danny take you to some convenient point a mile away, where you can shift your garments and put on an effective disguise."

"What's your scheme?"

"I want Quigley, if he or any one in his employ is watching you, to infer that you have left town. Tell Danny not to return for about an hour. You must return on foot, however, and watch the Barclay place, particularly the movements of Hilda West."

"Good enough! Leave that part of the work to me," said Chick, rising.

"Further than that," Nick added, "I can give you no instructions. You must be governed by circumstances."

"I understand."

"In the meantime—well, I'm going after Quigley," Nick grimly declared. "I'll find out what that rat has done and is doing, as well as who are with him in this game, or I'll chuck my vocation to the winds."

"Why not shadow him?"

"Nonsense! He is not to be caught in that way," Nick quickly objected. "But I'll find a way. Enough for the present. Get away with Danny as soon as possible. Leave Quigley to me. He is my meat, Chick, and you can bet your life I'll can him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TURN OF A WHEEL.

There was a very good reason why Doctor Gordon Quigley ventured to call upon Nick Carter early that afternoon, a reason of which Nick was entirely ignorant.

Patsy Garvan was directly responsible for it. He had left the Barclay residence more than two hours before, and in accord with Nick's instructions had undertaken to look up Abe Smollet's record, as well as Abe Smollet himself.

Patsy very easily learned that his quarry was a somewhat disreputable fellow, that he was addicted to drink and worked only part of the time, and that he once had been arrested for petty larceny.

Patsy very soon decided, in fact, that Smollet was entirely capable of taking a hand in almost any kind of a crooked game.

Fortune favored him, moreover, in that he soon succeeded in finding his man. While approaching a barroom within a stone's throw of the Howard House, Patsy saw an express wagon bearing the name of Gaston & Bridge. It had stopped in front of a hardware store adjoining the saloon. A lad of sixteen was perched on the seat, evidently waiting for some one.

At the same moment, Patsy saw a roughly clad man of forty crossing the street and heading straight for the wagon, obviously intending to speak to the lad. Turning to the window of the hardware store, Patsy pretended to be absorbed in viewing a display of pocketknives, at the same time listening intently.

"I say, Jimmie, where's Smollet this morning?" questioned the man after halting on the curbing. "Have you seen him?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Dawson," said the lad. "He just ducked

into Dolan's to get a drink. It's time he ducked out again, too."

"Gee! here's luck," thought Patsy. "I've got next right off the reel."

Dawson turned quickly toward the barroom, but the lad was right in that Smollet emerged at that moment, and the two men met on the sidewalk.

Smollet was a stocky, muscular man of thirty, with sandy hair, a florid complexion, his features smooth shaved, and lighted with a pair of sharp, sinister gray eyes. He started slightly upon seeing Dawson, which Patsy furtively observed, congratulating himself that he was within easy hearing.

"See here, Abe, you're wanted—and wanted bad!" was Dawson's greeting, uttered with an expressive frown.

"That so, Bill?" questioned Smollet, gazing more sharply. "As bad as that, is it?"

"You bet it's bad. The big squeeze won't stand for this sort of a thing. I've been chasing all over town after you. Where were you last night? Why——"

"Oh, I'll see him later," Smollet interrupted, with sinister assurance. "He can wait."

"He can—but he won't."

"Think not?"

Something in Dawson's voice and looks caused Smollet to pull in his horns. He eyed Dawson narrowly for a moment, then added doubtfully:

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. It'll be done, too, unless you come across with the bundle."

"Sore, is he?"

"Sore is no name for it."

"Where is he, now?"

Patsy could not hear the reply, for the two men had turned away and walked toward the curbing. Presently, however, he heard Smollet say to the lad:

"We've dropped the last package, Jimmie, and I'm going to dinner. Drive the team round to the stable and get Mike to unhitch and feed. I'll show up later."

"All right," cried the lad, evidently pleased to handle the ribbons. "I'll take them 'round for you."

"Good enough."

The wagon rattled away and turned a near corner.

Patsy pricked up his ears again and heard Smollet say:

"Come on! I want to see him, Dawson, as badly as he wants to see me. He's not the whole shooting match, you know, as long as I——"

Patsy could not hear what followed, for both men walked briskly away. He had heard enough, however, to convince him that he should make no mistake in attempting to learn of whom they had spoken and of what their mission consisted.

Somewhat to Patsy's surprise when he proceeded to shadow them, their course lay toward that outskirt of the town in which the Barclay residence was located, and he at first thought that that was their destination. They soon diverged into a road leading toward the river, however, and a walk of ten minutes brought them to a lane running through a belt of woods outside of the town.

Patsy had shadowed them with some little difficulty up to that time, but after striking into the lane he found shelter in the shrubbery on either side, and a short half mile brought the two men to an old mill on the bank of a narrow stream that emptied into the river at a point nearer the town.

One glance at the faded old building, the rank grass growing in the surrounding clearing, the great wooden wheel rotting in the dry sluice—one glance at these convinced Patsy that the old mill had long been out of use and deserted.

He made these observations from the shelter of the surrounding woods, crouching amid the shrubbery that grew profusely on all sides, while Smollet and his companion crossed the clearing and entered the mill through a partly open door that was hanging awry on the single rusty hinge.

"By Jove, there must be others in the old crib," thought Patsy, looking sharply for some safe way to approach it. "It must be the hang-out, or a meeting place of the gang that did this job. I must contrive to overhear what comes off in there, and also get a look at the big squeeze, as Dawson called him, even if I take long chances. I might accomplish it by crawling through that sluice. It appears to be dry and is deep enough to hide me."

Patsy could see only one end of the sluice, the other being hidden by a corner of the mill, in the side wall of which there were no windows or openings of any kind.

Making a short detour in order to reach a point near the outer end of the sluice, Patsy then could see the whole of the huge water wheel, some ten feet in diameter, also a small window near it in the end wall of the tumbledown old building.

The sliding shutter of the window was partly open; but no person was visible, nor any sign of life outside, and Patsy lost no time in stealing down the shrubbery-covered bank of the gully in which the sluice had been built.

Crouching on his hands and knees, he then crept hurriedly through the open sluice, and arrived, undetected, directly under the huge water wheel.

Patsy then was ten feet below the narrow window mentioned, which was nearly in a line with the top of the wheel. Through it he could hear the voices of men in the mill, but not so audible as to determine what was said.

"Gee! there's nothing in this," thought he, gazing up at the window. "I might as well be back in the tall timbers, where I came from. I must get nearer to that window by some hook or crook. The hook must be this wheel, I reckon, since the crooks evidently are inside."

Cautiously testing the timbers and the broad paddles of the wheel, Patsy decided that they were strong and firm enough to bear his weight, and he at once began to climb the huge, openwork wheel, using both the paddles and the crossbars within for a foothold.

Within half a minute he had mounted to a point some eight feet from the ground, and though still three feet below the narrow window, he now could plainly hear the conversation of the men in the mill.

"A fine trick you have served us, Smollet, a fine trick, indeed!" sounded a cold, stern voice, that struck Patsy quite familiarly. "Are you really as scurvy a rat as it indicates? If so, by Heaven, I'll force you to my terms, or end this whole business with your miserable life. I wonder that I wait even a moment to discuss it."

"By Jove, I've heard that voice before," thought Patsy, listening to what followed. "As hard as nails and cold as ice. I must get a look at him, by thunder, if it takes a leg."

Patsy waited briefly, nevertheless, listening to Smollet's reply.

"Oh, I am not shaking in my shoes, old man, because of your threats," he bluntly answered. "Hot air doesn't scare me worth a cent. You'll not plug me with a bullet, nor stick me with a knife, as long as I've got the bundle you're so hot after."

"What have you done with it?" snapped the other.

"Never you mind what I've done with it," said Smollet boldly. "It's in a good safe place, where I can lay hands on it at a moment's notice, and with no such risk as I took to get it. If you want it—now, here's the point: You'll come to my terms, not I to yours."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say."

"Weren't the terms agreed upon before you turned the trick?"

"Yes. I'll not deny that."

"Why have you fooled us in this way, then, instead of doing what you agreed?"

"I'll tell you why."

"Well, out with it!"

"I want my coin in advance."

"In advance?"

"That's what," Smollet declared, with a growl. "When I'm doing business with a bunch of blacklegs, I always make it a point to guard my own interests. How do I know you wouldn't give me the laugh after getting the bundle? Your face doesn't look as good to me as a certified bank check."

"Oh, that's the trouble, is it?" demanded the other icily.

"Aye, that's the trouble, nothing else," Smollet asserted. "I'd have seen you last night, mind you, if I'd known where to find you. I'd have told you, then, what I'm telling you now. I've got the package in safe-keeping, and I'll get it for you whenever you say the word and put the coin in my hand. That's all I'm waiting for and all I want. You've got to come across in advance."

"You evidently have never heard the old adage, Smollet, that there is honor among thieves."

"That don't cut any ice with me," Smollet said bluntly. "I'm out to make sure of mine."

"You'll get yours, my man."

"You bet I will—or you'll never get the package."

"Gee! that listens good to me," thought Patsy. "They are talking of Radcliffe's package, all right, and Smollet was the man to whom Joan Alden gave it. He went to the Barclay place in disguise and with his own team. His story about its having been stolen was a lie. He now is holding the package until he gets his money for the job, and it's dollars to doughnuts that the package has not yet been opened. If they come to terms, and Smollet goes to get it—well, I'll get both Smollet and the package, or there'll be something wrong with the cards. Now, by Jove, I'll have one look at that rat with a cold, steel voice."

There had been a brief pause in the conversation, enabling Patsy to correctly size up what he had heard. It was resumed at that moment by Smollet, who said, a bit less defiantly:

"Now, don't make a mistake, you fellows, and think I'm not willing to be on the square. I'm only taking good care that I don't get the worst of it. I'll fork over the package within an hour, old man, after you put the coin in my hand. That ought to be good enough for you."

"It is good enough for me, Smollet, on one condition," was the reply.

"What condition?"

"You must bring the package to—perdition! What's that?"

The last was a sudden, sharp cry of mingled fear and surprise.

The direct cause was a crash that seemed to shake the old mill to its foundations.

The primary cause, however, was Patsy Garvan.

Mounting a little higher on the huge wheel, bent upon venturing a brief glance through the narrow window, Patsy had found it necessary to bear his entire weight on the outer edge of one of the paddles, in order to bring his head in a line with the window.

Patsy weighed one hundred and sixty pounds.

Bearing upon the wheel at just the right point and angle, his weight caused the wheel to turn slightly on its axle, probably for the first time in half a dozen years.

The effect was only what one would have expected: The axle broke from one of its rotting standards.

The wheel fell about two feet to the bottom of the sluice, breaking in sections, and part of it crashed through the mill wall.

Through the narrow window, at which he wildly grasped in order to save himself from falling, Patsy caught sight of Smollet, Dawson, and three other men, all leaping up and reaching for weapons; and then his outstretched hands missed the edge of the window and he pitched backward, heels over head, bumping from one paddle to another of the falling wheel, and landing in a heap, stunned and bleeding, on the rocky bottom of the dry sluice.

CHAPTER VII.

CROOKS IN CONFERENCE.

Patsy Garvan was not long unconscious—not nearly as long as he was supposed to be by the crooks into whose hands he had fallen.

For they rushed out of the mill and around to the rear end of it, where the wheel and sluice were located, and there they found him lying on the rocks, with his face upturned in the sunlight, and with blood oozing from a lurid bruise on his forehead.

Accustomed to hard knocks; Patsy soon began to revive, and his first conscious impression was an audible one. He heard the voices of the rascals in earnest discussion, at once reminding him of where he was and what had occurred, and he discovered that he had been brought into the mill, that he was bound hand and foot and lying on the floor in one corner.

Alert again on the instant, Patsy listened, and presently ventured to peer from under one slightly lifted eyelid. He was surprised to see that he had fallen into the clutches of no less than five captors, and that one was an old offender.

"Holy smoke!" he mentally exclaimed. "That rat of a blackmailer, Doctor Gordon Quigley, as sure as there is juice in a lemon. He's the big squeeze, all right, but who is the other swell guy with whiskers. He is in disguise, by Jove, or I'm no judge of spinach."

The subject of these last characteristic comments was a well-dressed man of quite distinguished appearance. He was about forty years old, with a fine figure, dark hair and eyes, and with a full Vandyke beard. A diamond

glittered in his satin four-in-hand, also on one finger, while his well-formed white hands plainly showed that he was a stranger to manual labor. Though prepossessing in most respects, his intense black eyes had an expression that Patsy did not fancy.

In ominous contrast, moreover, were the three men in company with Quigley and this stranger—Smollet, in a soiled blouse and overalls; Dawson, in a seedy gray suit and woolen shirt; while the third, whose facial resemblance to the latter proclaimed him to be Dawson's brother, was clad but little better than a reasonably respectable tramp.

They were seated on some old barrels and boxes, all except Quigley, who was confronting them with his hands thrust into his pockets, and with a look of mingled assurance and determination on his hard-featured face.

"Sure of it! Certainly, Hawley, I'm sure of it," he was forcibly asserting, addressing the distinguished-looking stranger. "I've been up against these Carters before, and I know them root and branch. That fellow is Patsy Garvan, one of Carter's shrewdest ferrets."

"Thanks," thought Patsy. "You've got my measure, all right."

"It's a pity the fall did not kill him, which it came mighty near doing."

"Don't congratulate yourself on that," commented Patsy mentally. "I'm not half dead, nor on the way there."

"It would have saved us the trouble," Quigley grimly added.

"You don't mean that you intend to——" Smollet began apprehensively.

"I mean just what I say," Doctor Quigley cut in sharply. "We owe it to you, Smollet, this infernal turn of affairs. If you had done what you agreed and brought the package to me immediately after getting it, we should have been in no such mess."

"I dunno whether you would or not," growled Smollet defiantly.

"I know!" snapped Quigley. "I know, too, that we now must hang together and pull together, or these infernal sleuths will get the best of us. Do you want to go up for a term of years, or are you ready to take chances?"

"Where's your sand box?" snarled Dawson impatiently. "Are you showing the white feather at this stage of the game?"

"White feather be hanged!" Smollet sharply retorted. "I'll take chances with any of you fellows. All I want is what's coming to me."

"You shall have it, all right," put in the bearded man assuringly. "Take it from me, Smollet, I'll see that you get it."

"That's good enough for me, then," declared Smollet, yielding immediately to the other's authoritative tone. "I'll take your word for it."

"His word is no better than mine," said Doctor Quigley, sharply eying the expressman. "I always am on the square with a confederate. I have an unpleasant way, however, of stamping out rats that prove treacherous, or that might bite me. I have one in yonder corner. Take heed, or there may be another."

Smollet shrank perceptibly from the gleam that had arisen in Quigley's eyes. He shook his head and growled less aggressively:

"I'll do my part. That ought to be good enough for you."

"It will be—providing you do it!" Doctor Quigley pointedly answered. "That being settled, Hawley, we'll get down to business. There is no telling how much this spy overheard before he went down and out, and it may become necessary to put him to sleep for keeps. We must find out, too, what Nick Carter suspects and is doing."

"Do you think——"

"I'll tell you just what I think, Hawley, and just what must be done," Doctor Quigley interrupted.

"Do so."

"To begin with, then, Carter arrived here with his assistants this morning. That did not surprise me. I foresaw that Radcliffe would be advised to send for him. I have had some little experience with this same Joan Alden, and Carter has done her some service. It was a foregone conclusion, then, that he would be immediately employed."

"Admitting all that——"

"Hear me out, Hawley," Doctor Quigley again interposed. "We must get down to rock bottom, and lose no time about it, for time is valuable, and speedy steps must be taken to clip every thread that Carter can pick up and contrive to follow with any possibility of success."

"He must already have found one thread, Quigley, or this spy could not have discovered us in this old shack," Hawley apprehensively declared.

"That's the very point," Doctor Quigley quickly agreed. "He is keen, he is shrewd, he is farsighted, this Carter; but he shall find that I am his equal, his superior, and that he is no match for me."

"But how could this fellow have located us?"

"That is easily explained," replied Quigley. "Carter evidently doubted Smollet's story about the stolen team. He suspected that the man who took my letter to Joan Alden might be Smollet in disguise. That is one thread that he picked up. He started Garvan on Smollet's trail, therefore, and Garvan picked up Smollet in Chester and followed him out here. That's how he found us. That's why he was playing the spy."

"By Jove, I guess you are right."

"I know I am right," Quigley forcibly insisted; then darkly added: "But we have got Garvan. We can, if necessary, we must, wipe Garvan out of existence. Dead men tell no tales."

"But——"

"Don't talk of buts. There will be no alternative, Hawley, if it comes to a show-down for our own safety. Now, mark you, there is only one other threatening clew that Carter can find."

"Namely?"

"Your telephone communication from Washington."

"But he cannot learn who telephoned," Hawley protested. "I phoned from a public station. I certainly was not recognized, and my name was not mentioned."

"Very true. He cannot identify you, perhaps, but he can learn with whom you talked."

"Yourself."

"Exactly."

"That may involve us."

"It will—unless I prevent it."

"You prevent it? In what way? By what means?" Hawley demanded.

"Leave that to me. I will block him effectively on that point," Doctor Quigley confidently asserted. "I know where he can be found. I will call on him. I will contrive to bring up the matter and will tell him I was

called up from Washington, but will deny that I knew the speaker, or anything about the communication. I will assert that I was not the party wanted—and Carter cannot possibly prove the contrary."

"By Jove, that is true, also."

"Leave it to me, Hawley. Trust me to make good."

"And then?"

"Then—ah, the rest is simple. My plans are already laid," Doctor Quigley quickly declared. "Listen!"

He paused for a moment, glancing sharply at Patsy, but the detective had not stirred, and was apparently still in the gloom of utter oblivion.

"Three steps now are necessary," Quigley earnestly continued: "We need ready money, Hawley, to pay these men for their work and insure their subsequent silence. That must be obtained from Joan Alden."

"Joan Alden?" echoed Hawley. "Great Scott! how can that be done?"

"Easily," Quigley quickly declared. "She knows the value of the stolen package, the enormous importance of the state documents, and that Radcliffe's political future depends upon their speedy recovery."

"That's perfectly true."

"What will she not do, then, to recover the package? She will make any reasonable sacrifice, pay any reasonable price. That is what I shall wheedle her into doing."

"But Radcliffe will not permit——"

"Radcliffe will not know anything about it," Doctor Quigley interrupted. "I will see her alone. I will pledge her to absolute secrecy. I will pretend that the crooks have commissioned me to negotiate with her. I will tell her that I can restore the package to her for a mere nominal sum, say twenty thousand dollars. What is that to her? I have learned that she has a million in her own name. She will, for Radcliffe's sake, leap like a hungry trout at my offer."

"I really think that she will, Quigley, as far as that goes."

"I know that she will. She shall draw the money to-day and bring it to your place this evening."

"No, no, not to my place," Hawley quickly protested. "I should be liable to suspicion, in that case, if your plans were to miscarry."

"Not so. You are supposed to be in Washington. Your wife and family are in Europe. Your house is unoccupied. Only these Dawsons, who care for your grounds, are supposed to be on the place. What safer place could crooks appoint for a rendezvous?"

"There is something in that," Hawley thoughtfully admitted.

"She will go there willingly, moreover, while she might refuse to venture to this lonely spot. Furthermore, to relieve her of any personal fear, and to convince her of my sincerity, I will tell her that she may have Hilda West accompany her. Leave it to me. I know that I can influence her into——"

"Wait!" Hawley again objected. "You are overlooking something."

"Well?"

"Are we to derive only a paltry twenty thousand dollars from this venture? I will not consider that, Quigley, even for a moment. Besides, if these papers are returned to Radcliffe, my main object will not have been attained. His political ruin is more to me than money, very much more."

Doctor Quigley shook his head, smiling malevolently.

"Are you foolish enough, Hawley, to think I am not more mercenary, that I take such chances for such a sum?" he asked. "Put that idea out of your head. There is more to my scheme."

"More?"

"Much more," said Quigley. "The twenty thousand is only a side issue. I will relieve the woman of that amount, pay these men for their work, and I then will bolt for parts unknown, while you return to Washington. None will be wiser because of your flying visit to Chester—and we still shall have the state papers in our possession."

"How so? What do you mean?" Hawley demanded perplexedly. "Joan Alden will not settle unless she receives them."

"She shall receive them, Hawley. She shall receive them, all right," said Quigley, grinning. "But after she leaves your place with them in her possession, the Dawsons shall waylay her in disguise and again rob her of them. It's a perfectly simple problem, you see. I do my part, all that I agreed, giving her the papers and getting her money. How can I be blamed, then, if two unknown rascals afterward attack and rob her? Even so, it cannot be proved that we know anything about it."

"Thundering guns!" thought Patsy. "Did a more foul and treacherous cur ever live? I must find some way to head off his devilish game, or he will easily turn the trick."

As a matter of fact, then seeing no way to prevent it, Patsy was much more disgusted with the ominous turn of affairs, than alarmed by his own threatening situation.

The infamous project appealed most favorably to all of Quigley's confederates, however, for they laughed loudly, and adopted it with a readiness and enthusiasm plainly evincing their thoroughly unscrupulous character.

"All that now remains is to settle the minor details," Quigley declared, after a few moments. "I will see Carter, stave off any danger from that Washington communication, and then proceed to pull Joan Alden into my net. In the meantime, Hawley, this infernal sleuth must be removed to your place, and confined until we learn just which way the cat will jump."

"That can be done, all right," Bill Dawson put in. "I'll come after him in a covered wagon."

"Very good," Quigley approved. "And you must get the package, Smollet, and bring it to Hawley's house immediately after dark this evening."

"I'll do that," Smollet readily agreed.

"That goes, does it?" Quigley demanded, eying him suspiciously.

"On my word," Smollet insisted. "You can count on me, all right, now that I am sure of getting mine."

Doctor Quigley drew out his watch and glanced at it.

"Precisely noon," he said shortly. "I'll contrive to find and see Carter within an hour. Look after this other business, Hawley, and expect me at your place at three. The rear grounds and the back door."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CLOSING NET.

Nick Carter had hit the nail on the head in suspecting that Quigley had called on him only to divert him from following up the Washington telephone communication,

and to put up an audacious bluff that he knew nothing about the theft of the government documents.

Nick knew these to be characteristic moves of the crafty blackmailer, also that he was entirely capable of taking the bold steps he had mentioned during their interview, and which indicated plainly enough to Nick that Quigley knew where the package could be found, if it was not even then in his possession.

Nick did not undertake to follow up the rascal's movements, however, nor to prevent him from doing what he had threatened. He could see nothing to be gained by deviating from the course he already had laid out, and it was after one o'clock when Quigley left the Howard House, Chick afterward departing on the mission assigned him.

Nick then hastened to the hotel office, where he learned from the clerk that Quigley had, indeed, been living in the hotel for more than a month, apparently having no business of any importance in Chester, nor to be remaining there with any covert design.

"He has been waiting here to turn some kind of a knavish trick, and the opportunity for this robbery must have come up incidentally," Nick rightly reasoned, while leaving the hotel after talking with the clerk. "It's dead open and shut that he has a confederate in Washington, in spite of the cock-and-bull story he has told me, and it's equally certain that the party in Washington was the instigator of this theft. Radcliffe has a foe there who must have known that he removed the state papers, and who is now out to ruin him. I must contrive in some way to discover his identity."

Nick was not long in finding a way. Ten minutes later he was admitted to the private office of the local postmaster, Mr. Dale, to whom he introduced himself, and was invited to a seat.

"I wish to make a few inquiries, Mr. Dale, bearing upon a case I am investigating," he explained.

"I shall be very glad to aid you, Mr. Carter, if possible," was the other's reply.

"To begin with, then, how heavy a mail to and from Washington passes through this office?"

"It is not heavy," said Mr. Dale. "On the contrary, Mr. Carter, we handle comparatively few Washington letters."

"Do you see most of them?"

"No. My sorting clerk does, however, and the carrier who delivers the local letters."

"Are they now in the office?"

"Yes."

"May I talk with them for a few moments?"

"Certainly. I will call them," said Mr. Dale, hastening to do so.

Both entered the room a moment later, and Nick then stated what he wanted and cautioned them against disclosing his visit.

"A man named Quigley has been stopping at the Howard House for about a month," he explained. "I suspect that he has been corresponding with a man in Washington, whose identity I am trying to discover. Can you recall having delivered any Washington letters to Quigley, or any in the Howard House mail?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," replied the carrier, to whom Nick's question was addressed. "I know the man you mean. I have seen him in the hotel. He has been receiving several Washington letters each week."

"Did they bear any return address?"

"No, sir. They were always in a plain envelope, addressed with a typewriter. The postmark, however, showed that they came from Washington."

"I have seen them, too," put in the sorting clerk. "I think I can tell you to whom Quigley has been writing. That is to say, Mr. Carter, several letters bearing the same Washington address have passed through my hands each week during the past month. I do not recall having seen it before that time, which leads me to think they began appearing in the mail since Quigley arrived here."

"I see the point," said Nick. "I think you are right. Can you recall the Washington address?"

"Not the street and number. The name, however, is Roger Hawley."

"Were the letters in the Howard House envelopes?"

"No, sir. They were in plain envelopes, and they were addressed with a pen."

"You are sure of the name?"

"Yes, sir. Roger Hawley."

"Do you know of any such man living in these parts, Mr. Dale?"

"I do not, Mr. Carter. I never heard the name."

"That's all, then," said Nick, thanking them and rising to go.

He felt sure that he had scored the desired point. He had reasoned that Quigley, if engaged in any conspiracy with a Washington man, must have been in correspondence with him, and that it had not been confined to telephone communications. It was a neat bit of detective work, and a move that Doctor Gordon Quigley had failed to anticipate.

Nick at once returned to the Barclay residence. He found Radcliffe pacing to and fro in the library, haggard and nervous, worn out with worry and suspense. He had aged ten years in as many hours.

"Thank God! you have returned, Nick," he cried excitedly, rushing to greet the detective. "You have discovered something. You must have, or you would not have returned so soon. You said to-morrow, or——"

Nick checked him with a gesture and shook his head.

"You keep quiet, Radcliffe, and steady your nerves," he commanded, a bit sternly. "You are going to the bad on greased rollers. I'll throw up this case on the spot, unless you govern yourself. You'll go crazy, man, unless——"

"I am crazy, as mad as a March hare," groaned Radcliffe, making a desperate effort to compose himself. "You don't know what it means, Nick, to stand on the brink of ruin. Tell me—what have you learned?"

"Nothing definite," Nick replied. "Don't expect it so soon. I have returned only for additional information."

"You have found no clew, then, no trace of——"

"Wait. Answer my questions."

"Well?" returned Radcliffe, ghastly and impatient.

"Answer this one to begin with," said Nick. "Who is Roger Hawley?"

"I don't know. I never heard of him."

"Try again. Tax your memory."

"I am doing so."

"You cannot recall him?"

"No, no, positively! I never heard the name."

"It may, then, be an alias," said Nick. "There is some man in Washington, Radcliffe, who——"

"Hold on! Stop a moment! I know only one man in Washington named Hawley, but that is his given name."

"Who is the man?"

"Hawley Diggs. He is a chief clerk in the state department and a politician of some note."

"A friend of yours?"

"No. Far from it," replied Radcliffe, with a frown. "He is opposed to me in politics, and we have frequently clashed in matters of serious importance. He was bitterly disappointed, too, when I was appointed assistant secretary of state. He had felt confident of the appointment, and he hates me bitterly because of our rivalry and my success. Why do you ask about him?"

"Never mind why, Radcliffe," said Nick. "I'll dig the truth out of this matter sooner or later, but you must be patient. Where does Diggs live? Where is his home."

"Right here in Chester."

"H'm, is that so? Is he a man of means?"

"Quite wealthy, I believe, though far from being a millionaire. He has a wife and two children. They now are in Europe. His place in Chester is closed."

"And Diggs is in Washington?"

"Yes."

"Does he know anything about these state papers?"

"All about them. He assisted in drawing them up."

"Is he employed in your office?"

"No. He has an office in the same part of the building."

"Near yours?"

"Quite near, but in another corridor."

"Can you see his window from that in your office?"

"Easily. They are nearly opposite."

"Ah! That explains the milk in the coconut," Nick declared, with manifest satisfaction.

"What do you mean?" asked Radcliffe, staring.

"I mean that you can safely attribute the theft of your package of papers to Mr. Hawley Diggs."

"Impossible! He would not dare——"

"Rats!" Nick interrupted. "Men who hate, dare anything. Take it from me, Radcliffe, that he saw you from the window of his office when you prepared the package to bring it to Chester. Did he know you were coming here?"

"Yes, certainly, but——"

"There is no room for a doubt, Radcliffe," Nick again interrupted. "I have been sure of something of the kind from the first. I knew that this theft must have had its inception in Washington. Don't ask me to explain. Just wait patiently until I have finished my work. Where is Joan Alden?"

"Gone out with her maid," replied Radcliffe, perplexed by Nick's disclosures, but seeing plainly that he would not be questioned. "They have been gone nearly an hour."

"Gone out with her maid?" queried Nick, at once suspicious of any move made in company with Hilda West. "Where have they gone?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't Joan explain?"

"No."

"And you did not inquire?"

"On the contrary, Nick, I did inquire," said Radcliffe. "But I got no satisfaction. Joan evaded my questions. I fear I was foolish enough to betray some resentment. I am so infernally upset, in fact, that I hardly know what I say and do. The man was a stranger to me, you see, and——"

"Man?" Nick interrupted inquiringly. "What do you mean?"

"A man called here about two o'clock," Radcliffe explained impatiently. "He had a private interview with Joan in the library. It lasted half an hour. Joan then called her maid and told me she was going out for a short time. I asked her about the stranger, who he was, and what he wanted, but she only laughed and said she would tell me later."

"Laughed?" questioned Nick. "Are you sure that she laughed?"

"Sure? Yes, of course," said Radcliffe. "Is there anything remarkable in the fact that she laughed?"

"Decidedly so," Nick replied dryly. "Neither you nor she did any laughing while I was here this morning. There must be a reason for it. Describe the man, Radcliffe."

Radcliffe complied, giving Nick a very excellent description of Doctor Gordon Quigley. Before he had fairly finished, however, he digressed abruptly and pointed from the library window, saying, with some relief:

"There they come, now. They are returning. It may not have been of any consequence, after all.

Nick Carter's brows, however, had knit a little closer. He was somewhat surprised to learn that Quigley had been there, despite his expressed intention to do so. Nick did not believe that the rascal had called to inquire about a reward for the stolen papers, but with some ulterior object which Joan had had some reason for refusing to disclose.

Glancing from the window, Nick saw her coming up the driveway with Hilda West. He turned suddenly to Radcliffe and said:

"There is something back of this. I will undertake to solve the mystery, but you must do precisely what I direct."

"That's what I am doing, Nick."

"You must continue to do so," Nick said impressively. "I think I scent the rat in the meal. Do not ask Joan any more questions about the man, nor where she has been. Pretend that you have no further interest in the matter. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"And will do so?"

"If you advise it."

"I do, Radcliffe, emphatically," said Nick. "Unless I am much mistaken, you will never regret having obeyed me. I hear Joan entering. I want a word with her alone."

Radcliffe would have accompanied him, but Nick restrained him with a gesture, then stepped into the hall and found Joan sending her maid away with her outside garments. This suited him to the letter, and though he appeared oblivious to it, he saw the swift, suspicious glance flashed at him by Hilda West.

It was not much more sharp and apprehensive, however, than that which leaped up for an instant in Joan's dark eyes. She drew back a step, evidently embarrassed, then composed herself with an effort immediately noticed by the detective.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "You startled me, Mr. Carter. I did not suppose you had returned. Have you discovered anything?"

Nick gazed steadily at her.

"Nothing important," said he. "Have you?"

"I?"

"You—yes!" said the detective.

"Why, no, of course not," said Joan, as if both surprised and annoyed by the question. "How could I discover anything? What led you to think so?"

"Only because you have been out, and—— Step in here for a moment," Nick digressed, leading her into the parlor and closing the door. Then he added: "And because I saw Doctor Gordon Quigley coming this way more than an hour ago."

"Doctor Gordon Quigley?"

"You remember him, of course, the scoundrel who would have poisoned your father more than a year ago, in spite of the fact that lack of positive evidence enabled him to escape conviction for the crime. You remember him, of course."

Joan had turned pale at first, then colored deeply. She met Nick's steadfast scrutiny without flinching, however, and replied firmly:

"Yes, Mr. Carter, I remember him."

"Have you seen him recently?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"He called here an hour ago."

"For what?"

"To inquire about my father, he said, and to protest that he was innocent of having attempted to harm him."

"Anything more?"

"What do you mean?" questioned Joan, turning pale again.

"Was that all that he wanted?" Nick persistently inquired.

"Yes."

"Nothing more?"

"No, nothing more," Joan insisted. "Why do you question me so closely? What more could Doctor Quigley possibly have wanted?"

"I don't know," Nick replied, even more gravely.

"Nor do I, Mr. Carter."

"I do know, however, that he is as treacherous a rascal as ever went unhung. He is capable of any degree of knavery. I would advise you to confide in me, Mrs. Alden, if he had any other motive in coming here. If you are concealing anything from me, or——"

"Pardon! I have nothing to conceal, Mr. Carter," Joan again insisted, drawing back and shaking her head. "Please do not prolong these inquiries. I have no more to say on the subject."

"Very well."

Nick Carter bowed and opened the door for her to pass out. He followed her into the hall, then took his hat and left the house.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHECKMATE.

Chick Carter, carefully disguised, was lurking in the narrow lane back of the Codman place. It was a locality from which he could, by looking through the boxwood hedge already mentioned, easily watch the Barclay dwelling and grounds. He turned sharply around upon hearing stealthy footsteps behind him.

"Ah, it's you, Nick," said he. "I was more than half expecting you."

"Why so, Chick?"

"Because I saw you leave that house soon after Joan Alden and Hilda West entered it. I thought you would want to know where they went."

"You shadowed them?"

"Certainly, as you directed."

"I think I know where they went," said Nick, smiling confidently.

"Have you been told?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"To a bank, or a safe-deposit vault."

Chick Carter laughed.

"You've got a long head," he replied. "That calls the turn, Nick. How did you guess it?"

"I did not guess it," said Nick. "I deduced it from a woman's laugh."

"A woman's laugh?"

"Exactly."

"Explain," said Chick, perplexed. "I don't get you."

Nick informed him what had transpired in the house a half hour before, then pointedly added:

"Now, in view of her terrible anxiety, as well as all of the other circumstances, what on earth could have caused Joan Alden to laugh? One laughs only when one is pleased, and she could have been really pleased by only one prospect, one anticipation."

"The recovery of the stolen package."

"Exactly," said Nick. "Obviously, then, she expected it because of her talk with Quigley."

"Surely."

"Knowing Quigley to be a blackmailer, a rat out for the money by any crooked and contemptible means, my deduction was a natural one. He had blinded Joan with some sort of a plausible story, and bargained with her for the return of the stolen package. His price would be high, of course, more money than she would have in the house. I reasoned, therefore, that she went out to get some."

"Clever work," said Chick. "It hits the nail on the head. She went to the Chester National Bank, where she drew a large sum and took it home in a satchel loaned her by the bank. When they entered the house, however, Hilda West carried the satchel under her cloak."

"I see," said Nick. "Plainly enough, then, Quigley pledged her to absolute secrecy, barring confiding in her maid, his own confederate, and that's why she evaded Radcliffe and refused to confide in me."

"Undoubtedly," Chick agreed.

"I read it in the embarrassment with which she lied to me, also, a most painful and difficult act for a girl of her splendid character," Nick added. "She is about to sacrifice a small fortune to save her lover. We will now head that off. We'll lie low and await her next move. Take it from me, Chick, she will steal out with her maid again this evening, and go to fulfill her bargain with Quigley."

"That ought to be good enough for us," said Chick dryly.

"It will be good enough for us," replied Nick, with more grim intonation. "It will spell amen for a time for Doctor Gordon Quigley. I will can that rat for a term of years, Chick, or know the reason why."

It was late in the afternoon. The sun was running low in the west, its yellow light falling in golden patches on the lawn amid the elongated shadows of the trees surrounding the Barclay mansion.

Concealed amid some shrubbery, a vantage point enabling them to easily watch the house, the two detectives waited patiently until dusk had deepened into darkness, and a myriad of stars appeared in the purple sky. It was then that Nick Carter's prediction was verified.

Two figures, at first only vague shadows in the surrounding gloom, stole from under the porte-cochère and hastened across the rear grounds. They then could be seen more plainly in the starlight—the figures of two hurrying women.

"There they are," said Chick, the first to see them. "They are coming this way."

"Capital!" Nick muttered. "We shall have easy walking."

They drew back amid the shrubbery and waited.

The two women, Joan Alden, who was carrying a leather satchel, hastened through the gap in the hedge, then through a gate leading into the lane back of the Codman place. They passed within ten feet of the crouching detectives. Joan's determined white face could be plainly seen in the starlight.

"Now, Chick, we'll be after them," Nick whispered, when they had passed.

They stole out cautiously, and stealthily followed them.

It was less than a half mile to the place owned by Hawley Diggs, a large old wooden house shut in by numerous trees, and with an extensive tract of farming land back of it. It was on the latter part of the estate that Bill and Joe Dawson were employed, two rough fellows who were not averse to getting money more easily than by hard labor.

The house appeared to be shrouded in darkness, when, scarce thirty yards behind his quarry, Nick saw Joan and her companion enter the driveway gate and hasten toward the dwelling, which was some distance from the suburban road.

"A rear room may be lighted," he remarked to Chick, in a whisper. "The house is supposed to be unoccupied, you know, and the rats within may be cautious. We'll keep an eye on the two women, and—— Wait! Stop here and lie low!"

Nick had suddenly seized Chick's arm and drawn him back of a clump of shrubbery near the driveway gate.

Coming from the opposite direction, and just rounding a slight turn in the road, two men had suddenly appeared in the starlight, both so intent upon watching the two women then hastening up the driveway, that neither had caught sight of the detectives.

They came nearer, halting at the driveway gate, and one said, with a growl:

"We'd better not go in after them, Bill."

"No, I reckon not," was Bill Dawson's reply.

"They must come out this way after the big squeeze gets the coin. We can nail them on their way home and quickly get the package."

"Dead easy! Like taking candy from a kid."

Both detectives heard these sinister remarks, and both instantly guessed the truth, the contemptible treachery Quigley had in view.

Nick saw that both men were disguised with full beards, moreover, and he now knew with what design. He glanced significantly at Chick, and drew his revolver.

Chick drew one of his, nodding understandingly, and both stepped quickly from behind the shrubbery and confronted the two ruffians.

"Keep quiet, you curs, or I'll quiet you in a way you'll not fancy," Nick said sternly, thrusting his weapon under Bill Dawson's nose. "Not a yip, mind you, or down and out you'll go!"

Dawson shrank involuntarily, muttering an oath.

"Enough of that," snapped Nick. "What are you doing here?"

"Nuthing," gasped Joe Dawson, covered by Chick's revolver. "We work on this place. We ain't doing nuthing thet——"

"That will do," Nick again cut in. We'll find out later just how you two rascals fit into this knavish job. Take off that disguise and toss it on the ground."

"Who are you, thet you order——"

"I'm Nick Carter, the detective."

"Hell!" gasped Bill Dawson. "We're done fur, Joe."

Joe Dawson's face showed that he fully agreed with him.

"Off with your disguise, both of you, and your coats and hats," Nick sternly commanded. "Toss them on the ground."

Both rascals obeyed, though not without muttered curses and imprecations.

"Now, back into these grounds and up against that tree," said Nick. "Don't attempt any monkey business, or there'll be an undertaker needed."

The Dawsons ventured nothing desperate. They obeyed like cringing curs, backing through the driveway gate and up against a tree, some twenty feet from the street.

"One on each side of it," Nick commanded. "Now, Chick, handcuff them together with your irons and mine. They'll stay here until we return, all right, unless they can pull up the tree."

"We can bank on the tree, I guess," Chick laughed dryly.

The two rascals were quickly and safely secured.

Clad temporarily in the garments and disguise of the ruffians, both detectives then hastened to the Diggs dwelling. As Nick had remarked, they found that one of the back rooms was lighted, and that they could peer beneath the lowered curtain.

Doctor Gordon Quigley was seated at a bare kitchen table, counting a great pile of money. He looked remarkably well pleased with his work.

In one corner, both carefully disguised, sat Smollet and Hawley Diggs, with equally pleased expressions on their faces.

Joan Alden, looking very pale, but with her fine figure drawn haughtily erect, stood near the table, waiting impatiently.

Hilda West, with a covert leer in her gray eyes, was standing on the threshold of a door leading into the back entry.

On the table near Quigley's elbow lay the much-wanted package of state documents, brought there by Smollet, scarce a quarter hour before. Nick saw at a glance that the seals had not been broken.

Nick touched Chick's arm, then both stepped quietly to a near back door. Nick turned the knob noiselessly, finding the door unlocked, and in a moment both detectives were in the entry.

Doctor Quigley heard them, and bounded toward the door. At first sight he thought them the two Dawsons.

"What do you want? What do you want here?" he cried angrily. "Why——"

"We want you, Quigley," Nick cut in sharply, thrusting a gun under his nose and forcing him back into the room. "And you, Diggs! And you, Smollet! And you, Hilda West! We want one and all of you, and we've got you. Line up against the wall there until we can find a piece of rope with which to secure you."

Both Nick and Chick were out of their disguise before

the last was said, and the truth had come home to the four culprits with irresistible force.

Doctor Quigley had sunk back on his chair as if suddenly palsied.

Hawley Diggs had uttered a groan and covered his face with his hands.

Smollet and Hilda West were turned as if to stone.

It was not difficult to take in such a gang, and they were quickly secured, while Joan Alden appeared like one transfigured with amazement and gratitude.

Little more was said then and there, however, though the disturbance was heard by Patsy Garvan, then bound hand and foot in the cellar, and he easily made his presence and whereabouts known.

Explanations came later, after the entire gang had been lodged in the Chester jail, and after Nick Carter had conducted Joan Alden home and placed the unopened package of state documents in the hands of the amazed Radcliffe.

Such scenes of mingled joy and relief as followed cannot be verbally described, can scarce be imagined, in fact, and they went far to repay Nick and his assistants for the splendid work they had done. Their reward was not confined to that, however, as may be easily imagined.

It afterward appeared that Diggs and Doctor Quigley had met in Washington some weeks before, and had come together like birds of a feather. Learning of Diggs' hatred for Radcliffe, and knowing of Joan's long estrangement from her father years before, Quigley had thought it possible to obtain material with which to blackmail her and perhaps cause Radcliffe to renounce her, and he had hastened to Chester with that design, and soon succeeded in bribing Hilda West to aid him.

The infamous project still was on the ways, when, unexpectedly, Diggs discovered the opportunity to ruin Radcliffe in the manner described, a discovery made precisely as Nick Carter had deduced. He at once telephoned to Quigley, therefore, giving him the necessary information and instructions, and then hastened to Chester on the night express.

Nick Carter had sized it all up with well-nigh absolute accuracy, however, and with Patsy's testimony of what he had heard in the old mill, the entire gang was convicted of theft and conspiracy and sentenced, as Nick had predicted, to prison.

THE END.

"Letters of Fire; or, Nick Carter's Fourth Man," is the title of the story that you will find in the next issue of this weekly, No. 93, out June 20th. It tells more of the characters about whom you have read in this story and the one preceding it. Money, bonds, and negotiable securities aggregating nearly eighty thousand dollars are stolen from Amos Barclay's safe. How Nick runs down the guilty persons in this case makes a story that will keep you guessing till you have read "The End."

SUGAR CANE.

It would scarcely be possible to grow sugar cane except in a warm and moist climate like Cuba and other islands in the West Indies. It is never raised from the seed, but pieces of cane are cut and planted, and new canes sprout from each joint. In very hot countries, a sugar plantation will last sometimes for ten years; but in the Southern States, where it is cooler, the cane must be planted every two or three years. Success is only possible on plantations of thousands of acres, where labor can be had for small amount of pay, and where the machinery is at hand to crush the canes and express the juice.

The Syndicate of Crime.

Or, King Nelson's Puzzling Quest.

By HARRIE IRVING HANCOCK.

CHAPTER XIII—(*Continued.*)

What he had foreseen took place. The dogs caught sight or scent of him, and started to meet him.

"It won't do to have a muss with the dogs," reflected the detective, when he saw those canine guards advancing. "The Trompett would give me the contents of both barrels of her shotgun, without so much as asking a single question."

He halted, seating himself upon the ground. The dogs, seeing nothing hostile in his attitude, did not bark, though they came closer and closer, with noses close to the ground.

Thrusting a hand into a pocket, King Nelson drew forth a piece of cake. From an upper vest pocket he produced a vial. Letting a few drops of the liquid it contained fall upon the cake, the detective then tossed the morsel toward the dogs.

One of them growled, showing his teeth, but in a moment all three came closer to the food, sniffing at it.

There was a rush, a scuffle on the part of the canines. Each got a bit of the cake and gulped it.

In a flash their animosity and suspicion alike seemed to have vanished. All three of the animals came closer, whining low and eagerly.

"Want some more, eh?" chuckled Nelson, rummaging in his pockets, at which sign the dogs bounded toward him. Each received another morsel of cake, treated from the vial.

"Well, we're friends, aren't we?" demanded the detective, patting each animal in turn, while they gamboled around him in every phase of delight. "No, I haven't any more—not for you. Now run back to the house."

Such was King Nelson's control over the beasts that, after a protesting whine or two, they obeyed his gestures by retreating.

Now the detective moved slowly toward the house, paying no further heed to the canines, but reserving all his alertness for human foes.

Halting under one of the lighted windows, he heard voices inside, but indistinctly. Raising himself to the window sash, and inserting a thin blade, he silently slipped the catch back. On the ground again, he noiselessly raised the window an inch. One of the dogs came around to see what was happening, but uttered no growl.

"How is the woman?" was the first snatch of the conversation that King Nelson heard. He pricked up his ears, for it was Ike who asked the question.

"She's just as stubborn as ever—the jade!" answered The Trompett.

"And you haven't been able to fix her?"

"Not with a scare. She ain't to be scared. So I'm trying the chief's other plan—dosing her."

"That ought to fetch her," returned Ike approvingly. "Well, you'll get your orders soon, and won't need to do anything until then. The chief will be here to-morrow night."

At that mention of a woman, King Nelson became trebly alert with mind and ears. From the little that followed, he was able to make up his mind that The Trompett had a captive of the fair sex, and that, moreover, she was in durance vile somewhere upstairs. She was stubborn, this captive; the chief was interested in her subjection. And who was the chief? Vance Malloy? And if so, what was the game? Vance Malloy would fly high, or not at all! And was this matter connected with the case of Elsie Rockwell?

That Elsie Rockwell and the captive upstairs had something in common the detective was certain. But what was that something? He listened eagerly for more of the conversation.

There came a sound that filled the eager eavesdropper with disgust. It was Ike Crawford, collapsed in an easy-chair, snoring for all he was worth. Nelson, having just succeeded in picking several pinholes in the curtain that obscured his view of the apartment, made this discovery.

Soon the Trompett was snoring, too. She lay stretched on a lounge across the room from the window. Lying on her body, the muzzle clutched in her hands, was a shotgun.

There was something else in the room, too, on which the detective had not counted. At the foot of the lounge a bulldog slept with one eye open. The faintest sound in the building, or outside, would arouse the dog. He, in turn, would arouse his redoubtable mistress.

Though he debated and reconnoitered for an hour, King Nelson could see no way of getting into the house without giving the alarm.

"I don't need to do anything here until to-morrow night," he finally decided. "Then I can not only solve this mystery, but I shall also find out if Vance Malloy is really the 'chief' for these people."

Still, unwilling to quit the scene just yet, Nelson withdrew into the woods. A little later he stretched himself on the ground for rest, though, like the bulldog in the house, he slept with one eye open.

It was after daylight when he fully awoke. Down at the house there was smoke pouring out of the chimney, showing that The Trompett was awake. In a few moments her voice, angry and strident, came out upon the air:

"You shiftless, lazy, no-account wretch!" she screamed. "You worthless, ambitionless chromo of a man—get out!"

And Ike went on the spur of the moment—flying. For the Trompett had pounced upon him unawares, and now she appeared in the back doorway, propelling Ike with mighty muscle, in a fashion that sent him flying down the back steps. An empty water pail came after him.

"Go up to the spring and fill that, you vagabond, if you want any breakfast," screamed the shrew.

Ike, rising with as much dignity as he could, and ignoring the pail with lordly contempt, turned toward the woods. He came so close, that King Nelson had to crouch close to avoid being observed.

"You weak-kneed tramp!" yelled The Trompett after him. "If I had my way, I'd turn all lazy vagabonds like you into niggers."

With calm disdain for the dame's opinion, Ike sat down upon the ground, his head and shoulders supported against a tree trunk, and began to mend his shattered sleep.

"She'd make him a nigger, eh?" mused King Nelson, a thoughtful look coming into his face. "Why, a whiff from my bottle of chloroform would put Ike sound asleep, a little silver nitrate and water would give him just the tint, and—and I have all the things about me!"

What happened in the next ten minutes need hardly be described, therefore. At the end of that time, King Nelson slipped away, headed for New York, to pick up other threads of his great case.

It was an hour before Ike awoke. When that happened, feeling hungry, Ike arose and made his way toward the house.

As he stepped across the threshold, the woman turned to open her vocal batteries upon him. In another second, however, she emitted a screech.

"Well," demanded Ike huffily, "what ails you, woman?"

The Trompett tried to speak, but her voice failed her. She could only point to the mirror that hung on the wall. Lazily enough, Ike strolled toward it. Catching sight of his face, as black as coal, the big fellow began to shake.

"Woman," he cried, advancing upon her with the light of murder in his eyes, "what have you been doing to me?"

"Nothing, as I live!" gasped The Trompett, as frightened as himself.

"You said you'd turn me to a nigger, if you could."

"Y-y-yes," came the choking response. "But I didn't believe it would happen."

"Trompett," gurgled Ike hoarsely, "you're a witch! You did this by some spell! You've bewitched me."

Both were now shaking with superstitious fright.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO-MORROW.

Stopping at the Marlborough Hotel on his return to town, the detective looked up his young friend under the assumed name of Rice.

He found Phil Darrell in a room on the third floor, already up and dressed, and limping about the room with some difficulty.

"How's the ankle this morning, Darrell?"

"Better, but pretty painful yet, I can tell you, sir. However, I was just thanking my lucky stars it was my ankle, and not my neck."

"You may well say so. But get on your hat and let me help you downstairs. It's time we were over at my house. I've got much to tell you, and a big heap of thinking to be gotten straight

They were soon in a cab. Less than twenty minutes saw them deposited within two blocks of Fort Nelson.

On the way the detective said nothing of his adventure. He was reserving that for the secrecy of his private office. Admitted to the fort, they made their way to the corridor and up the stairs in silence.

"Go and see your patient now, Darrell. Don't be over a minute, though. Come right back."

Phil obeyed, soon reappearing.

"Well?"

"She is much better," answered Phil. "There is no

delirium; just a sort of stupor. She should soon rouse from that."

King Nelson touched a bell. Of the young assistant who answered he inquired:

"Any word for me from any one?"

"Yes, sir. Lewis is waiting to see you."

"Send him in at once."

One of the operatives whom Phil remembered to have seen the morning before in the same office speedily entered.

"Well, Lewis," began the chief briskly, "I hope you have word for me of Doctor Rockwell."

"Rather better than that," returned the young assistant eagerly.

"Such as what?"

"I have Doctor Rockwell himself in this house—in the room three doors down the corridor."

"Have you told him——"

"Nothing, Mr. Nelson, except that I was connected with the secret service, and that if he came with me, and obeyed me in everything, he might soon expect tidings of his missing daughter."

"And he came?"

"As a fish nibbles at bait—that is, after I had shown him my badge, and quieted his fears of a trap. He has been wandering about aimlessly in search of his child, as he calls her. He——"

"Can speak for himself," broke in Nelson, with a smile. "Bring him in here at once, Lewis."

In a few moments, Lewis reappeared at the door, ushering in Doctor Rockwell, a man of medium height, well on in years, with stooping shoulders, and hair and beard of almost snowy white. The old man walked with the air of one who is crushed under a burden of sorrow, yet from the eyes that lighted his haggard face there flashed a look of eager hope.

Doctor Rockwell tried to speak. He was trembling, so agitated that his words were incoherent.

"Sit down, sir," cut in King Nelson. At a nod from the chief, Lewis withdrew, closing the door after him.

"You want to know about your daughter?" went on the detective. "Be happy on that score. She is in this house, well looked after, and in no danger of any kind. You shall see her in a few minutes."

At hearing these words, spoken in a tone, and with an air most convincing, Doctor Rockwell's face took on a look of almost heavenly happiness.

"Now be good enough to listen to what I have to say to you," resumed the detective. With that, he gave a brief narration of the finding of Elsie's apparently lifeless body in the river, of her resuscitation, and of the calling of himself to the case. Not a word did the detective say of what had so far been learned on the case. Instead, he looked interrogatively at the aged physician.

"Can you tell me anything, sir, that will make this mystery clearer?" questioned the detective, when he had finished his relation.

"Nothing, sir, except that my daughter disappeared," replied the old man, "and that in her room I found a note from her."

"Which note I already have," replied the detective, opening a drawer of his desk, and producing therefrom the note in question.

Doctor Rockwell stared hard.

"But I destroyed the note," he protested.

"You thought you did—a common mistake. Now please be frank with me, my dear sir, and tell me everything which you think can have a possible bearing upon the attempt against your daughter's life."

But though King Nelson resorted to his most clever tricks of questioning, Doctor Rockwell continued to protest that he could remember nothing that would throw the least light upon the case. And his hearers, moreover, became convinced that he was telling the truth.

"By the way," broke in the detective suddenly, "Miss Rockwell is not your daughter, but an adopted child. What are her antecedents?"

"I know nothing of the child prior to my adoption of her, except that she was given a home at the Ursuline Convent, on —th Street. She was then about two years old."

"And you made no effort to find out anything about her?" rather incredulously.

"Be sure I did," replied the old man earnestly. "I was most persistent in my questions of the mother superior. But that good old soul assured me, upon her honor, that all she knew of the child was that she had been left there a year earlier—by whom it was unknown. The child appealed to me—to my heart, hungry for affection, and I adopted her. That is all I know of Elsie's history before she came to my home."

"Who named her?"

"The sisters of the convent, to the best of my belief."

King Nelson was silent, thinking. Phil, who so far had not spoken a word, here broke in with:

"Doctor, can you tell me whether Miss Elsie had ever felt any—any attachment for any man?"

"She has always loved me with more devotion than I deserved," was the reply, given with a good deal of emotion.

"But I mean the—the kind of love that a young woman gives to the man of her choice."

Doctor Rockwell slowly shook his head. Then, flushing with sudden anger, he looked Phil Darrell through and through.

"Do you mean," he demanded finally, and in a quivering voice, "to connect that question with the prospect of shame which my daughter mentioned in her farewell note to me?"

"Oh, my God, perish the thought!" uttered Phil, rising and pacing the floor. "My dear sir, no such thought——"

"You must acquit Mr. Darrell of the slightest intention to either wound you, or to reflect upon your daughter," broke in King Nelson, causing the young man to send him a look of mute gratitude. "It is very necessary that you should answer, too. Will you tell us whether Miss Rockwell, to your knowledge, had formed any attachment for any young man?"

"Never!" said Doctor Rockwell, with emphasis. "She is heart-free."

"Darrell," said King Nelson, after a moment, "will you take Doctor Rockwell in to see his daughter?"

Darrell obeyed. The old man stayed in the sick room but five minutes. Elsie did not know him. Doctor Rockwell was a prey to deep emotion, yet unspeakably happy to see his darling safe.

"Who is this quiet, businesslike man, who asks strange questions, and comes to conclusions with the speed of lightning?" asked Doctor Rockwell, as he and Phil left the sick room.

Thereupon Darrell dwelt in enthusiastic terms upon the career of King Nelson, the greatest of American detectives. Doctor Rockwell, immured in a country town, and deeply absorbed in his scientific studies, had never before heard of this criminal celebrity.

It was arranged that, for the present, Doctor Rockwell should remain at the fort, keeping strictly in seclusion, leaving the outside world, if it so chose, to consider him dead.

During the day, King Nelson went to the convent. The former mother superior had been dead for several years, and the detective could learn nothing he did not already know concerning Elsie Rockwell's advent as a baby at the convent.

Late in the afternoon, Phil came in hurriedly upon the detective in the latter's office.

"The best of news!" cried the young man radiantly. "Miss Rockwell has fully regained her senses. Her mind is again in working order."

"That will greatly simplify matters," answered the detective, rising from the desk at which he had been sitting in a deep brown study. "What she can tell me will doubtless take me out of the dark, and set me on the right track. I will question her at once."

"Pardon," interjected Phil hastily. "Miss Rockwell must not be questioned to-day."

"But this case," protested Nelson. "The difference of twenty-four hours——"

"If it meant a week's delay," retorted Darrell spiritedly, "I would still say that you have no right to go to Miss Rockwell to-day with your questions. She has just regained her mind. The slightest excitement—what do you say, sir?" to Doctor Rockwell, who had entered and now stood behind his younger colleague.

"I agree with your view," answered the old man.

"Then——" interrogated King Nelson, the momentary frown clearing from his brow.

"To-morrow!" said Phil quietly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS CAPTIVE.

King Nelson's return to New Jersey, which took place late in the afternoon, was performed with a mind of extreme calm. He could put his hand upon Ike Crawford in a moment; that same night, too, he seemed certain to catch sight of the as yet unidentified "chief" of this daring group of criminals. Moreover, he would see, and, if possible, get possession of the mysterious woman captive in that lonely house of the woods.

Then, with Elsie Rockwell able to tell her own story on the morrow, the case, puzzling as its start had been, seemed certain to come to a successful close.

But on this night, unless the most extraordinary happenings should ensue, the detective did not plan to make any arrests. Too many good cases, as subsequent developments in court have shown, have been spoiled by premature arrests. King Nelson never swung the iron door of retribution upon criminals until he had ready every particle of proof that was needed to insure a conviction.

Hence, having no arrests in view, King Nelson went alone. He was able to make his way by railway to within about two miles of the house.

Alighting just before dark, he plunged into the woods, purposely avoiding the trail, on which he might be seen.

As, moving between the trees, he came in sight of the house, he saw lights burning in kitchen and sitting room. There was smoke coming from the rear chimney, which appeared to show that it was around The Trompett's supper hour.

Of the three dogs which guarded the place, King Nelson now stood in no awe; he was on perfectly good terms with them. But the fourth, the beast that had guarded the sleepers in The Trompett's sitting room the night before, had yet to be reckoned with. The detective had in his pockets the things with which he hoped to deal with this canine.

Sooner than he had looked for, the opportunity came. While standing among the trees, and more than a hundred yards from the house, something between a snarl and a growl greeted him.

Feeling cautiously in his pockets, King Nelson produced a piece of cake already prepared.

"Here, take this," coaxed the detective, tossing the cake gently toward the animal.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!" remarked Mr. Bulldog, disdaining to recognize the bait.

"So you're going to make trouble, eh?" inquired King Nelson, sotto voce. "That's bad—for you."

Glancing coolly about him, the prowler perceived a stick lying on the ground. With a swift bound to one side, he snatched it up.

Not a second too soon, for the bulldog, regarding this as an act of open hostility, flew at the detective.

Seizing the stick with both hands, King Nelson held it out menacingly just before his stomach.

Obeying instinct, the dog sprang at the stick, closing his teeth around it. Thump! One of King Nelson's square-toed boots struck the dog full in the throat, dazing the brute.

Seizing the gasping animal as it lay on the ground, King Nelson poured a few drops from a vial upon the canine's tongue. Ten seconds later there was a spasmodic kick. Mr. Bulldog was unfortunate enough to be no more.

Only a moment was needed to drag the body into some underbrush. Then, with eyes and ears attending strictly to business, King Nelson approached the house. The three dogs with whom he had made friends the night before came frisking out to meet him. A frown and a gesture sufficed to send them back.

From the kitchen came the sounds of frying viands, mingled with human voices. With no trouble, the detective raised one of the windows just a crack, and prepared to listen and watch.

Over a spider on the stove stood The Trompett. In the farther corner from the stove, his chair tilted back in the angle, sat Ike Crawford, sullenly smoking a pipe.

"Ugh!" growled The Trompett, turning and catching sight of Ike's still coal-black face. "I don't care for any more dealings with the devil!"

"Meaning me?" snarled Ike.

"Meaning your face. If that ain't the devil's work, I don't know what it is."

"I believe it's your work as much as the devil's, old girl," grumbled Ike. "You said you wished I would turn into a nigger. If you ain't a witch, you're something mighty close to it."

"Don't you try to say that again!" protested The Trompett, in sullen anger, brandishing her frying fork as if it

were a war club. "I ain't no witch. I never had no dealings with the devil—at least, not direct ones. I'm too afraid of Old Nick to ever want to see him. Though I reckon I've got to some day," she added, with a hideous cackle, "and I'm afraid the old boy will claim me as one of his prize pupils. But what I can't understand is how your face was all that turned black. Your hands and the rest of your skin are as white as ever. Are you sure somebody didn't put up a job on you while you was asleep out there under the trees?"

"Certain," responded Ike, with emphasis, "'cause I wasn't asleep—not a wink. Even ef I had been, nobody could 'a' done that trick to me, 'cause my habits have made me wake at the slightest touch. It was witchcraft, I tell you, woman, whether you meant it or not."

"I didn't," maintained The Trompett stubbornly. She came toward the table, picked up a platter, and returned with it to the stove. As she turned, she caught sight of Ike, noiselessly helping himself from a bottle of liquor that had been standing on a pantry shelf.

"One decent drink, and then put it back," urged The Trompett. "Remember," she whispered, in a tone just audible to the outside listener, "the chief'll be here inside of a couple of hours. You don't want to have too much whisky on when he gets here."

"I never do take too much when I've got a trick on hand to turn," truthfully observed Ike, as he set the bottle back and smacked his lips.

"You ain't taken a bite upstairs all day," said Ike, in a low tone, as he seated himself at the table, and The Trompett began to dish out the food. "Don't you never feed her?"

"Who—her upstairs? Not when she's stubborn. It's against the chief's orders."

"The chief!" King Nelson began to fidget impatiently at that repeated mention. The shadowing of Lawyer Ford on the night before had been without avail, as leading to the "chief," for the lawyer had gone from his office direct home, and had spent the evening there, without callers.

"But I shall know within two hours," murmured the listening detective.

"I don't like to look at that face of yourn," complained The Trompett uneasily to Ike. "It makes me feel certain the devil is hovering right round us at this minute, and he——"

"Will you hold your clatter?" demanded Ike savagely. "What're you trying to do—take all the nerve outen me, on this night when I'm mighty likely to need it?"

"They're busy for twenty minutes, at least," murmured the detective, observing the pair from where he stood back in the dark. "And that woman captive upstairs——"

A moment later he stood at the front door of the house. It was locked, of course, but to a man of Allan Nelson's peculiar accomplishments that fact offered no obstacle. In a twinkling the door was open. Closing it, he went up the stairs as stealthily as a cat. He had long ago learned the simple trick of mounting old stairs without a warning creak from the boards.

There were three little, poky rooms upstairs. One after another he investigated them, and found all to be empty. But there was the "L" of the house to be taken into consideration.

In the rear room he found a door not more than two feet wide, nor more than three high. Hasp and staple, secured by a padlock, guarded the door.

From one of his pockets the detective took a bottle in which phosphorus had been dissolved in oil. This furnished all the light needed. Hardly more than sixty seconds were required to pick the padlock. Opening the door, bending low, he passed into an unfinished "L" some ten feet square.

Now he produced a tiny dark lantern. The flash of the match showed him a form huddled on the floor, at the farther end of the low-ceilinged, stuffy place.

The lantern lighted, he turned its rays upon the figure. It was that of a woman. An iron ring had been secured to the floor by three heavy staples. To this ring her feet were chained. She sat on the floor, with her hands behind her; doubtless these, too, were ironed, for into her mouth was fitted a gag that prevented her from making the slightest sound.

As to appearance, the woman was poorly dressed. She was slight of build; her dark hair was streaked here and there with turning gray. Her face, naturally sallow, was drawn and haggard beyond description. She was a woman who had suffered intensely. King Nelson's heart went out to her in an instant.

"Listen," he whispered, placing the lantern on the floor and kneeling in front of her. "In a second I am going to take the gag out of your mouth for a few moments. Answer all my questions truthfully, and as rapidly as you can. After that I shall replace the gag and leave you. But do not fear after that, for I shall be near at hand to give you succor. You may trust me. Your safety depends upon your not betraying to your captors that I have been here. Now then——"

He put up his hands to take out the gag.

Whack! A fearful blow, landing on the top of his head, stretched him to the floor beside the captive.

The blow was vicious enough to kill. King Nelson, dazed for an instant, next had an indistinct vision of The Trompett bending over him, a stout club in hand.

"Ike! Ike!" she screamed shrilly.

"Well, here I am," growled the brute, poking his head in at the door.

"And here you ought to be," snapped the virago. "Come and see what I've bagged."

To make sure that her game gave her no trouble, The Trompett delivered another dazing blow on the head. This time King Nelson's senses swam.

When he came to, he found himself lying on the floor in a room which he judged to be on the ground floor. His hands were manacled behind his back, his feet stoutly tied, while a gag had been forced into his mouth. Above him towered The Trompett, holding a lamp; bending over him was Ike, going systematically through his pockets.

"A pistol, and a beauty," muttered Crawford, examining the weapon a moment before thrusting it into one of his own pockets. "A few dollars in money; you can have that, Trompett. A—what's this? A policeman's badge! The dev——"

In her consternation, The Trompett almost let the lamp fall to the floor. Ike's ugly jaw quivered for a few seconds.

"So that's where you belong?" he gasped at last, glaring down at the detective. "Old girl," glancing up, "this chap, whom I never saw before, must be one of Sergeant Macul-

lam's friends. They're after me; they've got twenty-five years' worth of jobs against me already."

"And you've brought 'em here?" demanded The Trompett harshly, while her lips tightened.

"And this fellow is on to upstairs, and all about it! The chief's business is spoiled!" almost whispered Ike.

"There's only one way out of it," retorted The Trompett, in a voice of grim savagery.

"We've got to put this fellow where he don't tell no tales. See here, old girl."

Ike beckoned to the woman to follow him to the doorway. There they talked in whispers.

Over by the door the conference broke up. Back came The Trompett, standing over the fallen detective, glaring at him with unquenchable hatred. There was the sound of something being dragged in the kitchen. Then Ike reappeared with the heavy table.

"Up with him," growled the strangler.

With the utmost ease the muscular pair lifted their burden to the table top. Nelson's feet, hanging over, were made fast to one of the table legs. Turn after turn was made about his body and the table with a long rope, a knot being tied at every turn.

"He'll do well to get out of that!" chuckled the strangler hoarsely.

Disappearing, Ike remained away for two minutes.

"What's that?" demanded The Trompett, as Ike reappeared, bearing something in both hands.

"The box you stole from the railroad shop," replied Crawford.

The Trompett gave a gasp.

"It'll make our job sure," explained Ike, depositing the box under the table. "Now, upstairs with you, quick!"

It was plain that in this crisis, Ike's was the directing mind.

"Which looks bad for me," was the helpless detective's grim reflection.

He heard them moving upstairs. After a while they came down, went out. Then all was still.

Five, ten minutes passed. King Nelson, lying on his back, suspecting that he was being watched, was rapidly forming plans, hopeless though they seemed, for effecting his escape.

"What's that noise?" he suddenly wondered, pricking up his ears.

A low crackling—burning wood! The house had been set afire!

"They're going to burn me alive in here! Merciful Heaven!"

That the dry old building would go like a tinder box King Nelson knew. There was not a second to be lost.

Steeling his muscles, he made the great effort.

Just as the flames burst in through the blazing wall, he threw every ounce of straining muscle into the one chance that remained for life.

By a violent upheaval, he overturned the table, landing on his knees with the table lashed to his back.

After a moment of swaying, the momentum of the feat carried him over upon his face.

Struggling with the strength of Sampson, he got again upon his knees.

All in vain the effort! Hampered as he was, Nelson realized with an inward groan that it was utterly impossible to move an inch. He had succeeded only in changing his position. It was vouchsafed to him to die upon his knees, instead of upon his back.

Now his glance fell upon the box as the flare from the burning wall illuminated it. Once more came that stifled groan. It proceeded from the depths of King Nelson's anguished soul. His face was livid with fright.

For upon the box, in glaring letters, he read the word:

"Danger!"

And below that, in long, awesome letters:

"D-y-n-a-m-i-t-e!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

A FALSE MESSAGE.

By G. F. FRANCIS.

Among the families who had early made their homes in the West, was that of Doctor Edward Grant, who, with his young wife and a boy of four years, had located in a small village in Missouri, and invested their limited capital in one of the small but comfortable dwellings which were in course of erection here and there, but a considerable distance intervened between them.

Doctor Grant was a young man of twenty-eight, who had been located in his new quarters about a year at the time our story opens, and had established a fair practice.

The West at this time was in a very lawless condition, as it was overrun with desperadoes of every description, and crime of all kinds was of daily occurrence, and the law-abiding citizens were aroused to such an extent that vigilance committees were organizing all over the country.

The young doctor had by industry and economy managed to save more than enough to pay off the mortgage which still remained on the house, and had, on this very day of which we write, visited the city, which was a long journey from his dwelling, and had drawn from the bank in new, crisp bills the amount of the mortgage, and had them safe under lock and key in readiness for the morrow, on which day it was due.

"It makes me feel like a new man, Maggie," said the doctor, "to know that after to-morrow we shall own this cozy little house of ours, and not only that, but, as the West is so steadily increasing in population and the various branches of industry, this property will be worth double the amount we paid for it."

"Yes, dear Edward, we should be very thankful for our good fortune, for it is pleasant to think that we may be able to give Frankie a good education; but I wish the money was paid, as I don't feel comfortable or safe with so much money in the house."

"Oh, don't be uneasy, Maggie; everybody knows that we carry little of any value in the house, and it is not likely that any one will molest us to-night."

"I am very foolish to be so uneasy; but a low feeling has come over me, which I find very hard to banish. Still I will try hard to get over it."

"That's right; don't let such foolish ideas get into your head. So brighten up, and be my own lively little Maggie again."

In a short time she recovered her usual good spirits, and they spent a very pleasant afternoon in discussing their past experience, and the prospects of the future.

The night was fast approaching, and Mrs. Grant was

preparing the evening meal, when a messenger rode up to the door at a great speed, and asked for Doctor Grant.

"I am the doctor. What is it you want?" said Mr. Grant.

"I was sent for you by Mrs. Brand, whose husband, Colonel Brand, has been thrown from his horse, and now lies in a very dangerous condition."

"But why did she not send for Doctor Gillis, who lives quite convenient to the colonel, and not send such a great distance for me?"

"They have already done so, and he is now at the house; but, as he considers it a very peculiar and critical case, he does not like to act entirely alone in the matter, and he would like to consult with you on it."

After dismissing the messenger with the assurance that he would start immediately, Doctor Grant returned to his wife, to inform her of his journey.

Mrs. Grant received the information with a sorrowful countenance.

"How unfortunate that you should be called out to-night, Edward. Could you not put it off until to-morrow morning, and let Doctor Gillis depend on his own skill for to-night?"

"Why, Maggie, I am surprised to hear you speak so. It may be a case of life and death, and I am sure you would not want me to neglect my duty. And consider what an honor it is to be consulted by Doctor Gillis, who is reputed to be the leader of the profession."

The doctor hastily prepared himself for the trip, and, packing up such instruments as he would probably require, he bade his wife an affectionate adieu, and, urging her to be of good cheer until his return, mounted his horse and was off.

After his departure, Mrs. Grant, having put Frank to bed, and finished her supper, took up her knitting, and, humming a favorite tune, tried to feel as light-hearted as possible.

But, despite all her efforts, she could not get rid of the despondent feeling that had come over her, and some notion of insecurity she could not explain made her bring in from the yard a large and formidable-looking trap that her husband had brought with him from the East, and which was made for trapping wolves, foxes, and other animals of a vicious nature.

Having carefully set it on the floor in front of the bureau in which the money was locked, she threw over it a newspaper in such a manner that it seemed as if it had fallen there. She then resumed her knitting, and awaited her husband's coming.

She had been thus engaged for about half an hour, and it was now quite dark, when she was suddenly startled by hearing the window blinds thrown forcibly open, and a man, whom she immediately recognized as the messenger who had called for her husband, jumped into the room.

With a loud cry for help, Mrs. Grant ran to the farthest end of the room.

"You had better stop that noise, if you know what's best for you," said the burglar, as he significantly put his hand on the handle of a revolver that protruded from his pocket. "I did not come here to harm you, only to get that money which I know you have locked up in that bureau, for I saw your husband draw the money to-day, and I have shadowed him ever since."

In vain Mrs. Grant implored him not to rob them. To all her entreaties he merely said:

"Hurry up and give me the key, and save trouble; and, to prevent any danger from you, I guess I had better tie you in a chair until your husband comes back from the goose chase I sent him on," and the ruffian laughed loudly at his joke.

While he was talking he was carefully making a running knot on a strong cord, and while watching him, a desperate thought entered Mrs. Grant's head.

"Now, then, give me the key, and come and show me the drawer in which the money is hid."

Tremblingly handing him a key, they walked over to where the bureau was standing, and when within a slight distance from the trap, she suddenly gave him a violent push, and the next moment, with an unearthly yell, he fell flat on the floor with both legs caught in the jaws of the trap.

Quick as thought she hastily caught the rope from him, and, passing it around his body, soon had securely bound both arms and legs.

The miserable wretch begged to be released from the torture, both of the trap and the rope, but all in vain.

Mrs. Grant having taken the pistol from his belt, she kept the scoundrel covered with it, and nervously awaited her husband's arrival, which she felt would not be long, for as soon as he should discover the trick that had been played on him he would hasten home with the greatest speed.

She had not long to wait, for soon the welcome voice of her husband was heard outside, and in a few moments she was clasped in his arms.

"Why, Maggie, what means this? What! the scoundrel who sent me on the foolish errand. I thought it was meant for a joke, but I see the villain was up to robbery, eh?"

The doctor soon notified the authorities, and the desperado, who proved to be one of the most noted criminals of the day, was led off to prison, but was met on the way by the vigilance committee, who took him away from the constable, and the next day his body was found dangling from one of the trees in the neighborhood, to serve as a warning to all evildoers, and, on account of his character, his death was never made the subject of an investigation.

Mrs. Grant was looked on as quite a heroine for many a day, and the doctor never tired of praising her for her bravery.

WHY BOBBY GOT WHIPPED.

"That's what I call a good dinner," remarked Bobby, as he leaned back in his chair with an air of repletion.

"Bobby," said his mother, "I'm ashamed of you saying such a thing."

The minister, who was dining with the family, laughed heartily.

"Bobby appreciates the good things of life," he said, "like all the rest of us."

"Don't you think it was a good dinner?" Bobby asked the minister.

"Yes, indeed; I enjoyed it very much."

"Ma said she thought you would, because she didn't suppose you got very much at home."

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Church by Parcel Post.

Congressman David J. Lewis, father of the American parcel-post system, in his most roseate dreams of the future of the system never contemplated the coming of the time when so bulky a package as a brick church could be sent through the mails.

Yet a project is already on foot to do this very thing. The mails will be burdened with the church brick by brick, however, and the thousands of them required to erect the edifice will each be stamped and addressed to the "Methodist Church, Wenona, Somerset County, Maryland."

The representative from western Maryland will be asked to be among the senders of the first bricks. President Wilson also will be requested to mail a brick or two.

The congregation of Wenona Church desires to rebuild the edifice, which was destroyed by fire May 1 during a terrific windstorm. Wenona, by the way, is on Deals Islands, Chesapeake Bay, where the oyster is the chief subject of conversation, and the chief source of income. It is twenty-six miles from Princess Anne, the county seat.

Mice Make Nest in His Purse.

When Nestor Heinonen, an aged homesteader, opened a buckskin bag in the First National Bank, at Virginia, Minn., to deposit his life's savings of $500, he discovered a nest of mice in the sack. They had built their home out of his money. The fragments of his roll have been sent to Washington, where it is hoped the government will redeem the bills.

Horseshoing for College.

That the art of shoeing a horse be taught at Purdue University was urged by the Master Horseshoers of Indiana at their annual convention. Another resolution adopted pledged the association to work for a law giving horseshoers a lien on horses as a protection against debts for work.

College Men Favor Three-sport Rule.

A symposium of opinions gathered from deans, coaches, and captains of Yale, Harvard, and Princeton by the *Daily Princetonian* shows an overwhelming majority in favor of the rule permitting a student to engage in three sports in one year, provided it does not interfere with his studies. The opinions are against the "two-sport rule," which is in force at Princeton, and against which there has been much criticism by the students. Replies to the letters sent out to the different colleges show that the "two-sport rule" is in force in no other college, and that, with the exception of Williams, no college has ever felt the need for such a rule. All of them agree, however, that scholastic standing should be the basis for judging whether an athlete should be allowed to engage in more than two sports.

Princeton's excuse for a two-sport ruling was twofold, according to Dean Howard McClenahan, chairman of the committee on outdoor sports. Restriction was deemed advisable, he says, "from a physiological point of view, since it was not desirable for a young man to be in continuous athletic training." And also "from the scholastic point of view, it is certainly not desirable that one who is at least in name a student should be subject to the constant distraction of competition in athletics. The mere passing of examinations should not be the sole aim of the college student. Every student should have a considerable portion of the year completely free from the distraction of competition in athletics which he can devote to reading and studying, if he desires to do so."

Dean Jones, of Yale, says: "As a matter of fact, it seldom happens that any of our students participate on more than two teams, but we frequently have them playing football in the fall and taking part in either track work or rowing in the spring." He cites instances of men who have been both prominent athletes and scholars, and then adds: "The fact that we so seldom have trouble with our athletes on account of poor scholarship leads me to believe it wiser to continue our present plan of insistence upon a creditable record for all men who expect to participate in extra curriculum activities."

Dean Briggs, of Harvard, says the ruling at Harvard reads: "Without permission of the committee—committee on the regulation of athletic sports—no student shall represent the university in more than two of the three periods of sport in any one year." He adds: "President Eliot a good many years ago maintained that no student ought to represent the university in more than one sport for any one year, but we have always, so far as I can remember, allowed a man to represent two sports if his college standing is good; and by good I mean technically good—if he is not under serious college censure, such as suspension or probation. The rule is not altogether, and, in the minds of some persons, not chiefly, a rule for studies' sake. Some persons believe that training has become too severe for any but an exceptional person to undergo for autumn, winter, and spring. Every now and then we have allowed an exceptional man to play on three varsity teams, but a man who plays football and hockey requires a special vote if he is to play baseball, and cannot count on getting it. In general, I should say that among the major sports, track athletics interferes least with work, and that a track athlete who is a high scholar is by no means uncommon."

The *Yale News* editorially recently published some statistics which showed a vote in the senior class at Yale overwhelmingly opposed to any restriction on the number of sports in which an athlete might compete, and remarks that the big majority is surprising in view of the fact that the preceding seniors at Yale had voted the same way by only a very small majority.

Parke H. Davis, well-known intercollegiate athletics statistician, favors a revision of the "two-sports" rule as it exists at Princeton. He cites statistics to show that three sports comprise the natural limitation of athletic ability, "and since these three sports must be followed separately, one in each of the three seasons of the academic year, and since the modification of this rule would mean only four additional absent days in term time, it would seem that if an athlete possessed a substantial academic

grade, he might be permitted to engage in a third sport without detriment."

Knowlton M. Ames, chairman of Princeton's football coaching committee, writes that he has "never believed in the 'two-sports rule.' I would favor a three-sports rule under the present strict regulations with which the students must comply before playing on any major or minor university team."

The discussion is pertinent to the present condition of athletics at Princeton since there are several men who could have made a third team and would have been valuable material, among them Hobey Baker, who is debarred from both track and baseball because he has played football and hockey. A survey of the captains and coaches at Princeton has also revealed a practically unanimous opposition to the two-sport ruling.

Dog Saves Four Hit by Lightning.

A dog saved the lives of four persons by going for assistance when lightning struck the home of Richard Winn, near Marquez, Texas. Winn, his wife, child, and a negro woman were knocked unconscious, and the house was set on fire. The dog fled to the home of Winn's father, and by its peculiar actions drew him to the burning house, and the four were saved.

Finds Tooth in Babe's Ear.

Doctor H. G. Buckmaster, of Wilmington, N. C., recently operated on a baby, but he is undecided whether to render a bill for dental or surgical work. He removed a tooth from the child's ear. The baby's sister had kept a tooth, recently pulled, as a souvenir. The infant found it and pushed it into its ear.

One Hog for Each Family, Town Law.

A freak ordinance has been introduced in town council, at Barnesville, Pa., and it has prospects of passing. It is designed to reduce the high cost of living. The ordinance provides that every family shall be compelled to raise at least one hog a year.

Steel Merchant Proves Thug.

Edward Mendel, who was a respected steel merchant in Newark, N. J., by day, and a thug in New York by night, must serve eighteen years in Sing Sing prison. Mendel, who in Newark was a member of many fraternal organizations, lured Mrs. Pauline Koetzel to a freight yard in New York, and tore her diamond earrings from her ears. Many letters and petitions from Newark insisted that Mendel could not be guilty.

Curtails Baseball Tour.

The proposed American tour of the Keio University baseball team of Tokyo, Japan, will be greatly curtailed as a result of a faculty ruling.

According to cable advices, the Japanese players have been ordered to return to the university not later than June 16.

This ruling will necessarily confine the playing schedule to the Pacific coast.

Desperate Battle With Snakes.

William T. Merill, a young farmer living in the Allegheny Mountains, near Somerfield, Pa., was attacked by two monster blacksnakes while driving cows over the mountain road. The snakes had nearly crushed his life out when Joseph Cook, traveling man from Pittsburgh, drove up the road and, with Merrill's knife, cut the larger snake in two and beat the other off with the butt end of a heavy whip, killing it with a club.

The larger snake measured seven feet four inches, and the other was a few inches shorter. Merill was taken to his home and a physician attended him.

When Cook drove up, he saw Merill writhing with the two serpents coiled firmly about him, so that he had no use of his hands and arms, on a twenty-six-foot precipice along the roadside, near the Haggerty farm. Merill told Cook to take a knife from his pocket as he clutched the larger snake by the neck. Cook, drawing a large hunting knife from Merill's pocket, cut the larger snake in two. This freed Merill's hands, and he took the knife and cut at the other snake, while Cook beat it with a club until it fell from Meril's legs.

Meril said that the snakes had attacked his cows, and, in his endeavor to drive them off, they had overpowered him, and bound his arms so that he could not reach his hunting knife.

"Army" Escapes from Train.

After breaking their way from box cars into which they had been locked, overpowering a dozen police and railroad detectives, 165 members of "General" Kelly's army of unemployed left a Denver & Rio Grande freight train two miles north of Pueblo, Col., and marched back to town, demanding food.

The men were escorted to the city corral, where the police made arrangements to supply a menu of beans, bread, and coffee. Arrangements were made to send the army east as soon as cars could be supplied. The police had planned to send the train on through to Denver. The band, however, objected to this program, and the escape followed.

Find Bones of Huge Animal.

La Brea fossil fields, near Los Angeles, Cal., have yielded up the practically complete skeleton of a prehistoric elephant, which, it is believed, roamed the earth some 200,000 years ago.

"The animal in life measured more than sixteen feet in length," says Frank S. Daggett, director of the Southwest Museum. "It stood fourteen feet high, and its tusks were sixteen feet long."

Bloodhounds Hide and Go to Sleep.

A bloodhound's life is not all that it is cracked up to be. Every time the Merrick, N. Y., post office is robbed —and it happens with a regularity that is getting monotonous—folks says, "Call out the dogs," and expect the pack of bloodhounds that the Long Island Railroad keeps kenneled here for emergencies, to get excited about it.

The dogs used to get excited about it, but that was back in the days of their youth. It was great sport to go chasing off in full cry down Main Street and out along the Merrick Road, and keep the whole town on the anxious seat until it was time to come home with a chewed-up woodchuck or chipmunk. But, of course, they could not keep that up indefinitely, and, besides, the supply of woodchuck and chipmunk is running low.

When Postmaster Harry Zeiner opened the office the

other morning, he found that about the only things that the yeggmen had left untouched were the blotters, the inkstand, a portrait that hangs on the right-hand wall, and the last year's circus poster hard by the "Men Wanted for the Army" lithograph. The safe was blown to bits, and the back of the office was mostly daylight.

The post cards, the sheets of stamps, and all the cash were gone. It was a clear case for the bloodhounds from the start.

Deputy Sheriff Murray flashed the alarm to the kennels and the crowd around the office cheered as the pack hove in sight at the far end of the street.

"Here come the dawgs," was the cry.

But this bit of encouragement only got them as far as the office door. From that point they had to be leashed, and dragged forcibly inside, and made to sniff at the safe and the cash drawer. While everybody was trying to get Roger, the fiercest of the lot, to pick up the scent and be off, two of the pack found a soft spot behind the delivery window and were found some time later, fast asleep.

This more or less broke up the party. It was accordingly decided that either the yeggs had been careless enough to leave no scent, or the bloodhounds had gone on strike, and that whichever it was, the idea of running down the robbers with dogs was impracticable.

Blazing Rabbit Fires Hay.

Rabbits have done great damage to the big 600-acre Baker-Langdon apple orchard, at Walla Walla, Wash., and William Johnson, superintendent, was told that a rabbit soaked in kerosene and lighted would lead all the other rabbits from the place. He caught one in a trap and tried it.

Instead of running out of the orchard, the rabbit headed for his hole in a large alfalfa stack, and burrowed deep into its depths, setting the hay afire and endangering 1,500 tons.

Finds 280 Wishbones in Pile.

When doing repair work on an old house at Central Bridge, N. Y., Ora Howard dug up a box containing 280 wishbones. The collection represented those from most of the fowls native to these parts, and many which are not seen here.

It is said the old house was once inhabited by a man who entertained some peculiar beliefs regarding the good luck which wishbones would bring him, and that he was in the habit of paying children to collect specimens for him.

Fortunes Located by "Magic Needle."

Claiming that a "magic Spanish dip needle" in his possession has indicated by "three horizontal pulsations and two lateral vibrations" that the sum of $65,000 lies buried somewhere in East Savannah, Ga., John Deal, a farmer, is trying to organize a company to dig for the treasure.

Deal, who believes in many traditions and legends, puts implicit faith in his magic needle, insisting that it will ultimately lead him to a spot where fortunes are stored —to be gained by digging with perseverance.

It has just become known that an expedition he organized secretly several years ago, and which consisted of many merchants and business men of this town, was a dismal failure. The crowd under cover of darkness went to Pooler, Ga., and spent the night in digging at a point the magic needle indicated. The wealth was never found, and the disappointed treasure hunters returned to their homes in the gray dawn of the early morning, so ashamed that they never told of their experience.

The needle in which Deal places so much faith is made up of small particles of gold, copper, and other metals in a circular glass tube with a point at one end. It appears to be attracted by other metals, and also by water, and Deal claims that it is useful like the divining rod and similar instruments in locating underground streams. It has steel points for gold and silver deposits, and begins to "dip" when it is taken near these metals.

Deal has had the "magic needle" for twelve years. He purchased it from a tramp who wanted some money to get to the next town.

Loses Her Life to Save Dog.

Devotion for her pet dog cost the life of an old Cherokee Indian woman at Pembroke, N. C. The dog, however, was saved.

The aged Indian woman, accompanied by the dog, was walking along the tracks of the Atlantic Coast line. Suddenly she observed the approach of a fast passenger train. The dog in the meantime had gone a short distance ahead of its owner.

Unmindful of her own danger, the woman made a dash for the dog. She managed to save her pet, but in doing so was struck and killed by the train.

Live Sporting News.

Major-league ball clubs have been slow in releasing recruits this season, as it was feared that the Federal League might grab the most promising of the youngsters. When players have been released, the minor-league club has agreed to terms with the player before his sale was announced.

Johnny Kilbane, featherweight champion, easily won the six-round bout from Frankie Dailey, of Philadelphia, Pa. Kilbane scored one knockdown.

John M. Malloy, who claims he was a scout for the Chicago Cubs last season, has sued the National League club and Charles W. Murphy, its former president, for $2,000 for recommending Pitcher Zabel and First Baseman Mollwitz.

Jess Willard, the Kansas "cowboy" heavyweight, is persevering despite his many defeats. His latest battle resulted in a victory when he knocked out Dan Daly, of New Castle, Pa.

The Chicago White Sox have released three recruit pitchers. Clinton Rogge, who received his third tryout with major leaguers, and Ellis Johnson go to Toronto, of the International League, and Pitcher House was released to the Omaha Western League club.

Battling Levinsky, the light heavyweight of New York, who made a reputation by fighting twice a week, and sometimes oftener, is meeting a series of reverses. Following his defeat by Bob Moha, of Milwaukee, he went to Butte, Mont., where Jack Dillon gave him a neat trimming in ten rounds.

Pitcher Marshall, who was badly needed by the crippled Philadelphia Nationals, deserted the club following a fight with Sherwood Magee. However, he was induced to return, and gave the New York Giants a good trimming.

George Chip, who lost his claim to the middleweight

championship to Al McCoy in one round, has started to battle his way to the top again. He easily outpointed Knock-out Brown in ten rounds.

The management of the St. Louis Browns is making an effort to suppress gambling at its ball park. The St. Louis police department has been asked to coöperate with the club officials.

George S. Mitchell, an amateur boxer of England, who paid Georges Carpentier, the French heavyweight champion, forty dollars to box him in private, was knocked out after 1 minute and 35 seconds of fighting. He was knocked down five times. He hired Carpentier to meet him, as he was curious to see how long he could last.

Ad Wolgast's income tax was $230 for the ten months the law was in operation last year. He paid on a basis of earning $76,000 during that time.

Cal Delaney, of Cleveland, was easily outpointed in ten rounds by Ritchie Mitchell, of Milwaukee, Wis.

Matty Baldwin, the veteran Boston lightweight, held Johnny Dundee to a twelve-round draw at Cambridge, Mass., recently.

Young Kelley, a 115-pound boxer of Chickasha, Okla., has issued a challenge to any one of his weight for a bout to take place July 4.

Stanislaus Zbyszko, the Pole, continues to win mitches with second-rate wrestlers throughout the country. Raymond Cazeau was his victim in straight falls of 18 and 8 minutes.

Twenty-five years ago John McGraw, manager of the New York Giants, was just breaking in as a professional baseball player. He was paid $360 for three months' service. He has won three successive National League pennants, and is said to have received $5,000 per month while doing so.

Convicts to Work Overtime.

Convicts employed in the twine plant at the Kansas State penitentiary have agreed to a proposition made by the State board of correction to work overtime in order to meet the demand of Kansas wheat growers for binding twine. For this extra service the men of the twine plant will be given reduction of sentence. The men will begin work at sixty-thirty o'clock, and will not quit until eight-thirty in the evening. At the close of the day's work they will be served an extra meal.

First Pullman Ride at 103.

Mrs. Sarah Todd, 103 years old, had her first Pullman ride, when she came to Walla Walla, Wash., from Eugene, Ore., to enter the Northwest Christian Home for Aged here. In speaking of the ride, she contrasted it with the hardships of traveling in the old days. She is a constant pipe smoker, and declares she has had the habit since she was a child.

Wireless Drives Scouts from Army.

When the commanding officer on the border of Mexico wants to send a message to a subordinate in command at a distant point, or to the firing line in a practice battle, he does not write his message on tissue paper, wrap it in a capsule, and give it to a trusty scout to deliver at the risk of losing his life.

Instead he scribbles a few words on paper, hands it to a messenger of the signal corps, and a moment or so later the other officer, sometimes 250 miles away, is reading it. The army uses the wireless on the Mexican border. It is in the efficiency of the signal corps, and its use of the wireless, that the United States army of to-day stands far ahead of the army of years ago. Science has donated in the wireless telegraph a gerat aid to warfare, almost the equal of new explosives and new types of guns.

The signal corps can keep in touch with various divisions of armies with ease. The field radio-wireless section of Company D, Signal Corps, Second Division, can set up its outfit in one minute and thirty seconds. It can set up, send a ten-word message thirty-five miles, and be on the run again in ten minutes.

Then there is the "Telefunken" radiotelegraph outfit, which was brought from Germany four years ago, that country and the United States being the only nations to use it. This outfit consists of two wagons, one to carry a power plant and the other the wireless instruments. It can send or receive wireless messages 250 miles over land or sea. Two operators can take separate messages at the same time over the same instrument.

The wire section of a signal-corps company can lay or take up wire on the run, on the ground or through the water. Six miles of wire are carried on each cart.

Takes Own Reflection for Burglar; Shoots.

Policeman Dinegan, of New York, knows a burglar when he sees one. Dinegan can tell him by his looks.

Accordingly, when George Heald, the caretaker, braced Dinegan with the task of entering the home of Mrs. William Orr Barclay, and driving out a burglar, the patrolman was keen for the chase. He summoned Policeman Fulco, and together they went to the Barclay house.

Dinegan heard a door upstairs slam and went up. He opened a door cautiously, and saw a man at the end of the room. Dinegan raised his revolver, and the man covered Dinegan with his gun at the same instant. Dinegan shot twice and jumped back, yelling to Fulco that he had got his man.

There was a crash of falling glass. Dinegan had shot twice at his reflection in a mirror.

Lives Seventy Years on One Farm.

Mrs. Olley Rowland, 103 years old, is dead near here on a farm on which she had lived the last seventy years. William Matney bought the farm from Mrs. Rowland fifty years ago with the provision that she should live on it the rest of her life, expecting that she would live only a few years. He died about five years ago, selling it a year before his death with the same provision. She made the farm pay well, and the owner did not get a cent for the crops it produced.

Some Recent Inventions.

One of the most interesting of the recent inventions is a telephone device for the use of the deaf. It consists of a telephone transmitter, worn on the person or placed upon a table, and a small telephone held to the ear. For women's use, the device is made up in the shape of a small leather hand bag. Lifting the flap uncovers a pair of transmitters, and the bag is simply placed on a table, a store counter, or the like, while a small hand telephone is held to the ear. The bottom of the bag contains a battery and the ear device. The transmitters are so constructed as to make sounds as loud as desired.

In the interest of sanitation, there has been invented

a sealed paper shaving cup, containing a small piece of soap, and an inexpensive brush, to be thrown away after being used once.

To keep butter on a dish cold without the use of ice, there has been invented a hollow earthenware cover which may be filled with water, which cools the air under it by evaporation.

A novel dial has been patented which may be attached to any clock, transforming it, when the minute hand has been removed, into a one-hand timepiece, which the inventor claims is more easily read.

To steady a violinist's hand and induce him to use his wrist as much as possible, a bracelet with adjustable weights has been invented.

To prevent a person learning to swim from sinking, even should he wish to do so, an Alabama man has invented a floating framework to which he is fastened by half a dozen elastic bands.

A new torch to melt sealing wax carries the wax in tongs which may be turned around to drop it when softened where it is wanted without burning the fingers.

For saving lives at sea there has been invented a watertight cask in which a person can float indefinitely until rescued as a valve admits air, and food supplies are carried.

A new trimmer for lawn grass consists of a single pair of shears attached to a wheel that operates them as it is pushed along.

Twins Look Alike, Can Cheat at Bat.

The Shannon brothers, who are playing on the Seton Hall varsity baseball team, of North Orange, N. J., are twins. They look so much alike that one who is a better hitter than the other does most of the batting, unless they are watched closely.

Frank Chance's Pet Dog Only Canine Chauffeur.

Frank Chance, manager of the New York Americans, claims the distinction of being the only automobile owner in the world who has a dog chauffeur. A couple of years ago Chance bought a roadster, and started to teach his dog how to handle the throttle, and to-day, when the machine is not going fast enough to suit him, the unusually smart little canine will take its paw and push the hand throttle around until the car increases its speed.

One of the stunts that the ball players on Chance's team like to pull off is to get their manager's dog in his roadster and have him bark and growl at the car because it will not move when he pushes the throttle forward. The little animal doesn't understand that there are gears and clutch to engage before the engine can move the machine.

Lawsuits Invade Baseball Circles.

Baseball disputes are getting into the courts with frequency now. Both the clubs of organized baseball and those in the so-called "outlaw" Federal League organization have gone to the law to obtain redress for real or imagined grievances.

The Federal League tried something new when it brought a $25,000 damage suit against Pitcher Earl Hamilton, of the St. Louis American League club, for breach of contract. Hamilton deserted the St. Louis Browns and joined the Kansas City Federals, but was induced to return to the former organization by its president, and by his father, who showed him that he was morally bound to organized baseball.

Under the recent ruling of a Federal judge that baseball contracts are invalid only when the player is dissatisfied, it is thought the Federals do not have much chance to get damages from Hamilton. However, they are taking a chance, and, if they win, will start similar proceedings against Williams, Baumgardner, and Agnew, of St. Louis, and Kahler and Blanding, of Cleveland.

James A. Gaffney, president of the Boston Nationals, brought suits for $25,000 against James A. Gilmore, president of the Federal League, and Ed Hanlon and Otto Knabe, charging them with conspiracy for luring Pitcher Jack Quinn from the Boston team. The Philadelphia Nationals brought a similar suit against the Chicago Federal League club. They also ask for an injunction to prevent the Federal League from tampering with their players.

Despite lawsuits, injunctions, Federal League raids, and the baseball war, the national game appears to be as popular this spring as ever before, except in the National League. The attendance so far in the latter organization has been nothing to brag of.

The attendance in the two big leagues on opening day alone was 160,000, while good crowds also packed the Federal League parks. Twenty thousand persons saw the first Federal game in Baltimore, while the crowds were equally large in Kansas City and St. Louis. The schedules of the American Association and Federal League conflicted the first week in Kansas City, with the result that the association club suffered.

The Chicago White Sox who opened the season at home with Cleveland drew the largest crowd, 28,000 persons paying to see the game. Boston was next with 24,000, and Detroit third with 22,000. The entire attendance in the four National League cities was only 63,000.

It probably will take months to determine whether the new Federal League will share the patronage of the fans in the major-league cities.

First Power Plant in Arctic.

The first electric plant in the Arctic is being erected at the Episcopal mission at Point Hope, Alaska, which is 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The town has about 400 inhabitants. The nights there are six months long, so the need of electricity is apparent. The wind maintains an average velocity of twenty miles per hour there, and will be used to drive the electric generating apparatus.

Roller Skating Kills Girl.

Four hundred little girls were in line at the funeral of Myra Brackenbury, of Independence, Mo., who died three days after she was slightly injured by falling while roller skating. Although her knee was bruised only slightly, blood poisoning set in. The girl was seven years old.

Squirrel's Prank Causes Trouble.

Climbing animals and birds have not learned to have respect for high-voltage electric lines, and they often cause interruptions in service in different parts of the country. As yet it has been impossible to guard against such troubles.

A squirrel climbing to the top of a pole decided to investigate a 16,500-volt line of a St. Cloud, Minn., power company, and interrupted the service to five stations over

twenty-six miles of line. The linemen found the adventurous little animal next morning at the foot of the pole. The squirrel's whiskers and ears were burned off, and a hole was burned into one hip. His curiosity had cost his life.

A crane, alighting on a tower near the San Joaquin River, in California, was responsible recently for the grounding of a 104,000-volt line of a San Francisco power company. Naturally the same crane will never be the cause of such trouble again.

A 3,200-volt "feeder" of a railroad-signal system was burned out a short time ago. When tests disclosed the fact that the wire was grounded, it was examined at the point of breakage, and the charred bodies of two mice were found. The inquisitive mice had gnawed into the insulation, bringing about a short circuit.

United States Torpedo Kept Secret.

The United States navy department has won its suit to prevent the disclosure to other nations of the construction of the Bliss-Leavitt torpedo, used in the United States navy. The temporary injunction restraining the E. W. Bliss Company from disclosing the construction of the torpedo has been made permanent by the supreme court.

Loses Hand in Nap on Tracks.

After going to sleep on the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks and being struck by a freight train, Chester Marbley, twenty-five years old, of Coatesville, Pa., lives to tell the tale. His right hand was severed, but he was thrown off the tracks without further injury.

Johnson Training for Moran Battle.

Jack Johnson, champion heavyweight boxer of the world, laughs at statements that he will be beaten by Frank Moran, the Pittsburgh, Pa., heavyweight, whom he meets in Paris, France, in June.

The negro pugilist, who has begun light training for the bout, declares he will reduce his weight to 205 pounds, and that he will easily dispose of the American "white hope."

Johnson has been telling everybody that harsh treatment on this side of the water drove him from the country, and made an alien of him. Furthermore, he declares that no American shall ever wrest the title from him, that he will never meet an American fighter unless he is confident that he can win. He even says he will cancel his fight with Moran if he finds he cannot get in condition, and will substitute some European boxer whom he would rather see win the championship.

"After I meet Moran," says Johnson, "I will take on Gunboat Smith, Jess Willard, and all others who want to fight me, but my price is $30,000 per fight, win, lose, or draw."

Moran, who is in America now on a theatrical tour, will weigh about 192 pounds in the ring. He has a large following of fans who apparently believe he will win the heavyweight title.

According to ringside reports from San Francisco, Cal., Willie Ritchie proved beyond a doubt, if there ever was any, that he is the rightful holder of the lightweight crown. His showing against Tommy Murphy, whom he defeated in seventeen of twenty rounds, and with whom he held his own in the other three, showed that he is the class of the 133 and 135-pound scrappers of the present day. Murphy showed that he is through fighting, but that he is as game as any man who ever wore a pair of gloves. He was badly beaten, but was never off his feet, and was always fighting back.

Put United States Forests to Private Uses.

Almost every conceivable use to which land may be put is represented in the permits reported by the forest service for special projects on the national forests. Some of the uses shown range, alphabetically, from apiary through brickyard, cannery, cemetery, marine railway, rifle range, and turpentine still, to wharf and whaling station.

There are 15,000 permits in force for such special uses, which are distributed geographically from Alaska to the Mexican line, and east to Florida. This figure does not include any of the 27,000 permits in force for grazing cattle and sheep on the forests; nor the 6,000 transactions for the sale of timber, and the more than 38,000 permits issued last year for the free use of timber by settlers, miners, and others in developing their homesteads and claims; nor the nearly 300 permits for water-power development.

California led all the national forest States in the number of these special use permits, followed by Arizona, Colorado, Montana, and New Mexico in the order named. The largest single class of permits was for special pastures, or corrals, to be used for lambing grounds, shearing pens, and the like. Next came rights of way for conduits, ditches, and flumes, virtually all of these being free.

Various agricultural permits come third, telephone lines fourth, with more than 1,000 permits for 6,500 miles of line, and drift fences for the control of grazing animals, fifth. In both of these latter classes, too, the permits are free. Reservoirs for which more than 600 free permits were issued for the occupation of more than 100,000 acres come sixth. The rest of the uses are not classified, though there are a large number of apiaries, camps, summer hotels, and schools. The use of the government's lands for schools is given free; for hotels a charge is made.

The principle which governs the charge is based, according to the forest service, on whether the use of the land is sought for a commercial purpose. If it is the intent of the user to make money from a resource which belongs to the whole people, the service holds that he should give a reasonable return for that use. If, on the other hand, farmers want to use government land for their own telephone lines, irrigation works, and schools, the government gives them that use without cost.

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